

SECRET SERVICE

OLD AND YOUNG KING BRADY, DETECTIVES.

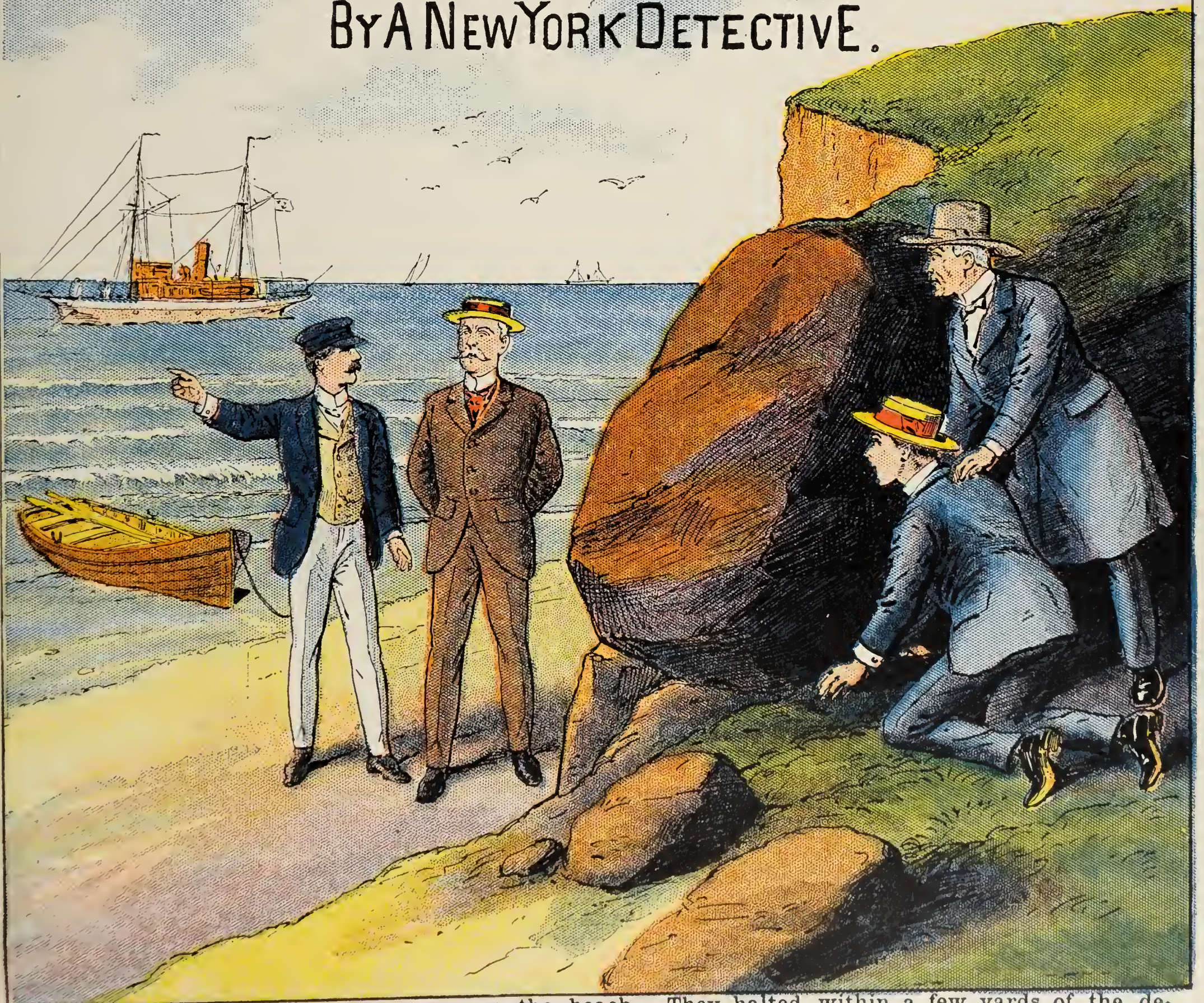
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No. 123.

NEW YORK, MAY 31, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BRADYS AT THE BEACH; OR THE MYSTERY OF THE BATH-HOUSE. By A NEW YORK DETECTIVE.



Leisurely the two yachtsmen came up the beach. They halted within a few yards of the detectives. "There is the house," said Strong. "It is one of the finest places at the beach."

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THE BRADYS AT THE BEACH;

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CHAPTER I.

THE LONG BRANCH MYSTERY.

"It's a hot day," said the chief of the secret service, mopping the perspiration from his brow. "I'd like a chance to get out of the city myself. Now, gentlemen, here is a case at the beach for you, which you ought to be very glad to accept."

"A case at the beach!" exclaimed Old King Brady. Surely, that is a timely one."

"Indeed, it is. I think it will be more agreeable at Long Branch for the next few days than in the city of New York."

"What is the case?" asked Old King Brady. "A summer hotel mystery?"

"No; it is murder!"

"Murder?"

"Yes, the strange mystery of a bath house. Indeed, I can tell you it is a case which will tax your best efforts."

"That is what we want," said Harry Brady, with a laugh.

The two Bradys, America's most famous detectives, had just finished a thrilling case of mystery and were ready to tackle something new.

Every criminal in the country stood in fear of Old King Brady.

That gaunt, powerful old man with the iron gray hair and the broad white hat, was a familiar figure in the haunts of crime.

The younger man, Harry Brady, or, as he was sometimes called, Young King Brady, was his protege and pupil.

Together they had built up a mighty reputation.

So that when any mysterious case of crime puzzled the country, the first thought was to turn it over to the Bradys. There was a feeling of surety that the case would be solved.

And there was a reason for this, for they had never failed. No case of mystery had ever passed from them unsolved.

So when the Long Branch mystery was reported and the whole country became stirred up over it, the chief of the secret service decided to put the Bradys upon it.

It was, indeed, a case of most mysterious sort.

The chief took up his note-book, and read:

"Case number 4174, the great Long Branch mystery. Reported by Detective Wade and assigned to Clark and Long, of the regular force."

"That is the case," he said. "Now these detectives are utterly unable to cope with it."

"Humph!" said Old King Brady. "Is that why you give it to us?"

"Yes."

"You must have confidence in our ability."

"I have," replied the chief. "I believe you are the only men in this country who can handle it."

"Nonsense! Because we have played in good luck heretofore, you think we are infallible. That is not so."

The chief laughed.

"That's all right, Brady," he said, "but you fellows have

a winning way. Those other fellows may be just as good detectives, but they don't win."

"Well, we may fail."

"Perhaps so, but you'll allow me to doubt it. Now you will undertake this case!"

"What is it?"

"Oh, pardon me. I have not given you the details yet."

The chief scanned his note-book.

"Here it is in brief," he said. "Mr. Holland Jones was one of the leading citizens and summer residents of Long Branch. He owned a fine residence very near Elberon.

"On the twelfth of June, last, Mr. Jones was at Long Branch with his family. Their villa is one of the finest in the colony.

"Mr. Jones owned a fine yacht and was fond of bathing. His row of bath houses on the beach in front of his residence were finely equipped.

"He frequently bathed there. On the twelfth of June, about two o'clock in the afternoon, he was seen to go down to his bath house. A few minutes later he was seen to go into the water.

"Now, the mystery of all is the number of contradictory stories told. One of the family servants declares that Mr. Jones returned from the bath house and was seen to enter his residence. Another servant declares he did not.

"A villager swears that he met Mr. Jones on the ocean walk at half past three. One of the clerks of the United States hotel says Mr. Jones was on the piazza of the hotel at four o'clock.

"However this was, Mr. Jones did not return that night to his home. His wife and son and two daughters became much alarmed and telephoned the police at midnight.

"Search was made through all the public resorts of the town. But nobody had seen Mr. Jones. Not the least clew to his whereabouts could be found. Of course, his family were frantic.

"When morning came it was remembered that he had been seen to go to the bath houses. So search was made in that direction.

"A thrilling discovery was made which only added to the mystery. One of the bath houses was open. A necktie and a pair of cuffs belonging to Mr. Jones were found in it.

"They were saturated with blood. The interior of the bath house looked like a butcher's shambles. Blood was everywhere.

"These signs of an awful crime were there. But beyond these not the slightest trace of Jones could be found. Whether he had met with foul play or not, or what had become of his body, if murdered, remained the mystery of the bath house.

"Since then every possible effort has been made to solve this mystery. A large reward is offered. There, you have the case."

The Bradys had listened with the deepest interest.

Old King Brady whistled slowly.

"That is a case," he said. "One can find no fault with it."

"No, and I think you will find it worthy of your mettle."

"It is assumed, of course, that the millionaire was murdered?"

"Yes."

"And his body disposed of?"

"Just so."

"Perhaps the murderer dumped it into the ocean."

"If so, it should have washed ashore. It could hardly have gone out to sea from that point."

"No, not unless a powerful undertow got it," said Old King Brady reflectively.

He drew a pencil from his pocket and made copious notes.

"Has anybody interviewed the family?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I have a report here from Cross."

"Let me have extracts from it. Were the family all at home that day?"

"Yes."

"Was any inquiry made in regard to known or possible enemies of the missing man?"

"Yes. It was affirmed that he was not known to have an enemy in the world."

"The usual case," said Old King Brady, dryly. "Now, about this contradictory evidence of the servants. Has that been reconciled?"

"Both admit the possibility of their being mistaken."

"Just so! They saw Mr. Jones, but it might have been that day or a week before. That is all. Now, Harry, let us take a run down there."

"All right," agreed the young detective.

"I wish you luck," said the chief.

"Of course, the family are yet there?"

"Oh, yes."

Old King Brady arose.

"All right, chief," he said, "we will report when we find the body and capture the murderer."

"Very good! I shall hope that will be soon," said the chief.

So the Bradys started out upon one of the most thrilling cases of their career.

Old King Brady lost no time in carrying out his plan. The two detectives went down to the Branch on the first boat.

They at once applied at the residence of the missing millionaire.

The place had the appearance of the residence of sorrow. The blinds were shut, the piazzas empty and all was funeral-like and solemn. The very atmosphere was impregnated with gloom.

In response to the rap of the detectives a servant came.

The Bradys gave her their card.

A moment later they were seated in a richly furnished room. In a few moments a black robed lady with classic features appeared.

"You are detectives?" she asked in a quiet manner.

"We are," replied Old King Brady.

"Your name is familiar to me. I have heard much

of you. I will say that if you can solve the mystery of my husband's fate I will double the reward offered."

"That is very generous," said Old King Brady. "But we can give you no positive assurance that we can do so."

"Oh, I do not say that."

"We have come to ask you to give us every possible clew."

"I shall be pleased to do that."

"We desire to ask you some questions."

"I will answer all."

"Very well! Some of these questions may seem personal. I trust you will not take offence. I assure you they are very necessary."

"I will answer anything you may ask."

"Very good! How old a man was your husband?"

"He was fifty-three."

"Comparatively young. How long have you been married?"

"Thirty years."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady, making his notes. "Have you and your husband ever experienced domestic quarrels?"

The woman winced at this question.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE BEACH.

A pained expression swept across her beautiful sad face.

For a moment it seemed a difficult matter for her to control herself. Then she replied:

"Yes."

Old King Brady made a note of this in a purely perfunctory way. He did not allow her to see that he was even a bit interested.

"What was the nature of the trouble?" he asked.

"A personal quarrel!"

"Ah! Do you mind telling the animus of the affair?"

"It was jealousy."

"How long ago was this?"

"We had been married but one year."

"Ah! What was the result of this jealous quarrel?"

"My husband thrashed a prominent society man of that day, who he fancied was paying me marked attention. It was all a whim of his fancy. Colonel Sam Gardner was an old schoolmate and my friend, that was all."

"So he thrashed him?"

"Yes. Caned him on the street."

"What retaliation did Gardner offer?"

"None. He went away directly to South Africa. I have never seen him since."

"Was this all?"

"Well, not exactly. As a result of that quarrel my husband and I were separated nearly a year. We were reunited after the birth of my first child."

"I am aware, madam, of the delicacy of all this," said Old King Brady gravely. "And it is a private matter which will never be divulged by us."

"I feel that I can trust you."

"Of course, there is hardly a possibility that this affair of so many years ago can touch upon the present matter. But a detective must know all facts, even of a remote date, that he may study every possibility of the case."

Mrs. Jones looked pleased.

"Your method is unlike that of the other detectives who have come here," she said. "I believe you will succeed."

"Time will tell, madam. Now, you say you have never seen this Colonel Gardner since?"

"No."

"That was nearly thirty years ago."

"Yes."

"He may be dead long since."

"To be sure!"

"Did any other incident ever mar the course of your married life?"

"None! We have never even known of an enemy."

"Did you see Mr. Jones go to the bath house that day?"

"Yes."

"Did you see him return?"

"No."

"Then you have not seen him since?"

"I have not!"

"Did Mr. Jones have any amount of money or valuables on his person?"

"Yes. I think he had a thousand dollars in currency and he wore a diamond ring and stud."

Old King Brady made a note of this.

"What do you think of the report that he was seen in the town later?"

"I do not believe it."

"Then you think he did not return from the bath house?"

"I think he went down to the beach, took a dip, went into the bath house and was struck down by an assassin. Then the body was towed out to sea or sunk in the ocean!"

Old King Brady was reflective a long while.

Then he asked a queer question:

"Are any of your children engaged to be married?"

Mrs. Jones looked surprised.

"No!" she replied.

Old King Brady smiled.

"You may wonder at that question," he said, "but I once solved a mysterious murder by finding that the ambitious young man engaged to the millionaire's daughter, murdered the millionaire hoping to quickly get a chance at the young girl's heritage."

Mrs. Jones flushed.

"Human nature is sometimes dreadfully desperate," she said.

"That is so. Now what I am groping for is a possible motive. When I find that, I will soon produce the guilty party for you."

"Your methods are remarkable," said Mrs. Jones with admiration. "I am sure you will find my husband's murderer. But if you fail to find a motive—what then?"

"I may find that your husband was not murdered."

"But his disappearance? The horrible state of the bath house. All the evidence points to it."

"Yet he may not have been the victim."

"What do you mean?"

"He may have been the murderer himself."

A short gasping cry escaped Mrs. Jones. Her eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped. "It could never be! Oh, no! Why, it is too preposterous! You can never entertain such an idea."

Old King Brady shot a furtive glance at Harry.

"Of course, I am speaking of an abnormal theory," he said. "We will not consider it at present. I shall hope to find a motive very soon."

"Oh, I am sure you will."

"Now, we would like to see the bath house and look about the beach."

"I will get you the key. The bath house has not been touched and is in the same shape as on that day. I trust you will find a clew."

A few moments later the Bradys were strolling down to the sandy beach.

The day was delightful by the rolling surf.

There was an absence of the fearful humidity felt in the city.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry, "this is a fine place. I almost feel like taking a dip myself."

"Not here," said Old King Brady. "The associations are too grewsome."

"Oh, yes, of course!"

They had now reached the row of neatly painted bath houses.

Old King Brady and Harry carefully looked them over.

They noted their position, their distance from the water, the character of shore outline and many other details which became at once fixed in their minds in most indelible fashion.

Then Old King Brady opened the first bath house and examined it very carefully.

From one to another he went.

Finally he came to the one which had been the scene of the crime. The two detectives keenly inspected it.

Blood stains were on the floor, on the walls, and even on the ceiling of matched pine.

Certainly it looked as if a struggle for life had taken place there.

"There is one thing sure," said Old King Brady after a while, "that crime was never committed here."

It was a startling conclusion.

Harry straightened up.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, aghast. "What do you mean?"

"It is easy enough to see. No such blood as this ever comes from a human being."

"What?"

"It is not human blood."

"By the Lord," gasped the young detective, "do you believe that?"

"I feel sure of it. This is the blood of an animal. It has been systematically daubed all over the place. It is a fake."

The young detective whistled.

Then he went out and sat down on the platform. He stared vacantly at his partner.

"A fake!" he muttered in a daze. "Then there was no murder?"

"To the contrary, I believe there was."

"You talk in riddles," said the young detective. "Make it clear!"

"Well, of course, I can prove but little. But what does deduction teach us?"

"Go on!"

"It teaches us much. If this is not human blood, then Mr. Jones was murdered at some other spot. The murderer to draw away the scent made up the bath house to fool the detectives."

"And it has fooled all but Old King Brady."

"For which I crave only the credit of my poor senses and a bit of reason," said the old detective. "Yet I have gained but little. The mystery is really increased tenfold."

"The question is, is Mr. Jones alive or dead? Is he a murderer or was he murdered? If one or the other, where is he dead or alive at the present moment?"

"That is for us to solve."

"Exactly!"

For some while they were silent.

Harry then arose and walked slowly down to the water's edge. The tide was high.

He studied the surf line a few moments. Then he came back.

"I don't believe there is undertow enough there to carry a body out to sea," he said.

"You don't?"

"I do not!"

"Then we will hardly waste time on that theory. In fact, I am inclined to fancy that the clerk of the hotel might be right after all, when he said he saw Mr. Jones at four o'clock."

"In that event, he was murdered somewhere else."

"If it is a certain fact that he was murdered."

"Do you think it doubtful?"

"I think it possible."

"Dence take it," said Harry. "we don't seem to gain anything. Do you think it logical that the man did this job himself, and that it was only a trick to blind pursuit, while he made for some other part of the world?"

"It is possible, but hardly logical."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, here is a man with a large fortune, a happy home and a bright family. Why should he adopt any such method of deserting them?"

"It hardly seems likely. Yet strange things happen. We do know this, that he is missing."

"True enough!"

"Now, you believe that these stains are not human blood. What sort of animal do you think this blood came from?"

"I have no means of knowing. It may have been a sheep. Certainly some creature with plenty of the fluid."

CHAPTER III.

SIFTING THE CASE FOR A CLEW.

Harry gave an eager start.

"The blood of a sheep," he cried. "Can that not be established by chemical or microscopical process?"

"I don't know about that. A chemist, however, could tell us whether the corpuscles were human or animal."

"There is our point."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead!"

"Well, suppose we find out that the blood came from a sheep. The carcass must have been procured near here and brought here!"

"The blood, you mean."

"Well, yes. We will say the blood was brought here. It would require fully a quart to do all this damage."

"Say about a pint. A little blood will make a big show."

"A pint, then."

"Very good! It could have been brought here in a bottle in one's pocket. The smearing and splashing is easily accomplished. What clew does it furnish?"

"The source from which the blood came. The sheep—"

"Hundreds of people visit the abattoirs around the country to get blood from freshly killed creatures for the use of anæmic people. It would be hard to identify this particular quantity of the fluid."

"That is so!" agreed Harry. "You assume that the thing was premeditated and the blood brought here from some distant point."

"That is about the idea."

"In that case it seems almost easy to believe that the supposed victim is himself at the bottom of all this trouble. That he has perpetrated a clever trick for some purpose as yet unfathomed."

"Not necessarily. We will assume that Mr. Jones came down here and took his bath."

"Yes."

"Then he dressed himself and went over to the United States Hotel, where he was seen at four o'clock by the clerk."

"Well."

"From that time and point he disappears. The mystery begins. Was he decoyed and murdered in some other part of the town? Did the assassin go to the trouble of making it appear that he had been killed in the bath house, assuming that the authorities would believe his body thrown into the ocean?"

"Or did he smear the bath house with blood before he went up town? Did he then take care to disguise himself and get out of sight, as he hoped, in the eyes of his acquaintances out of the world?"

Harry was staggered.

"Both theories are logical in face of the facts," he said. "But yet, I can hardly believe the man would do such a thing. What is his motive?"

"There are only two things which could possibly furnish inducement."

"Ah, what are they?"

"First aberration of mind. An insane man will adopt strange methods. Secondly, that cause of nine-tenths of all worldly troubles, infatuation for a woman."

"A woman!" gasped Harry.

"Yes."

"Is it possible that we shall find a woman also at the bottom of this case?"

"It has often proved so in the past."

"You are right. But not a breath of suspicion or scandal has been brought up against this man."

"Yet, that is no evidence that the double life does not exist. I repeat, that these are the only two things powerful enough to induce a man to perpetrate such a deed of cunning and deception."

There was no division of opinion between the two detectives on this point.

Old King Brady found a small piece of linen in the bath house on which were some of the blood stains.

"We will have this sample of blood analyzed," he said. "We will make sure that this is not human blood. Of course, I may be mistaken."

"I think it is well!" agreed Harry. "Now what course shall we pursue?"

"If it is a case of insanity, no doubt we shall hear from Mr. Jones in some distant part of the country. But we will proceed at once on the theory that he has decamped with the purpose of making his friends believe that he is dead."

"Good. I think we will soon hit upon a clew."

"I hope so."

The detectives now left the bath house after carefully locking the door. They returned to the house with the key.

Mrs. Jones had been anxiously awaiting them.

"Have you formed any conclusion?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Old King Brady. "Several, but we cannot divulge them just now."

"After you went out I recalled a fact which I think you ought to know."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady, "what is it?"

"We have learned that a very desperate gang of house breakers have been at work in Asbury Park and Long Branch for many weeks past. Only the day before Mr. Jones' disappearance they robbed a house a mile down the shore from here. Perhaps they killed and robbed Mr. Jones."

Old King Brady bowed.

"It is possible, madam," he said. "We will keep that in mind."

"Oh, I hope you will solve the mystery. It is too much

to hope that my husband is alive, but I am very desirous that his murderers should be punished."

"Rest assured we will do our best," declared the old detective.

The Bradys now took their departure. Soon they had reached the business part of Long Branch.

They visited the hotel and listened to the current gossip on the street.

No clew could be found which would support either theory chosen by the detectives.

Everybody was imbued with the belief that a dark murder had been committed.

No other theory had support.

After two days of active and sharp work in the town the detectives were compelled to admit that they had gained nothing.

They decided to return to New York.

"I want to have these blood specimens analyzed," said Old King Brady. "I feel sure they will support my theory completely."

So they took the first boat back to New York.

Old King Brady visited a chemist and submitted the blood stains to him. He promised an early report.

Then the detectives looked up Mr. Jones' business affairs in New York.

It was learned that he had an office in Fulton street. There his confidential business man was found.

His name was David Strong.

He was a thin, nervous individual with a cat-like movement and a nervous manner.

His keen, piercing eyes looked one through and through.

The Bradys interviewed him closely. At its conclusion they formed many new theories.

David Strong was singularly reticent in regard to Mr. Jones' private affairs.

"Of course, you are justified to a certain extent in keeping these matters close," said Old King Brady. "But at the present time it is of the utmost importance to get hold of every clew possible."

"Then you must go to somebody else," said Strong, tartly. "I believe that Mr. Jones is dead. But, if I divulged his secrets, I should be breaking a trust which is as sacred after death as before."

"You are unusually conscientious," said the old detective.

"Well, I have a right to be."

"You admit, then, that your employer had secrets."

"I admit nothing," declared the secretary, angrily.

"Well," said Old King Brady, adroitly. "I advise you to keep the secrets well. That is your part. But it is my part to find them out."

"You will never do that."

The old detective smiled.

"Very well, Mr. Strong," he said. "I wish you good day."

When the detective had left the office, Old King Brady said:

"He is our man, Harry. He knows all. We shall get at the bottom of this mystery through him."

"Not by any voluntary aid of his, I fear."

"Oh, no! But he will cut his fingers again, just as he did to-day. It's just as I tell you. Holland Jones is a man with a double life."

Harry shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know," he said, "you may be right, but something tells me that Jones has been foully dealt with."

"I will not dispute the possibility of that," said Old King Brady. "In fact, I think it quite likely."

"I think, however, that we may be able to get a clew through this fellow Strong."

"We will shadow him."

"A good plan."

The Bradys learned that the private secretary was a bachelor and that he lived at an uptown hotel in good style.

He was a member of several leading clubs and made quite an appearance in society.

Moreover, the Bradys also discovered that he was fond of yachting and kept a sloop yacht in the North River.

"Pretty good clip for a man who cannot get over five thousand a year salary," said Harry.

"That's the point. Oh, I like to get hold of these fellows who live beyond their means."

"There is no doubt but that Strong does."

"Of course, he does. You see, we will soon find the woman in his case."

"The woman?"

"Why, yes. Do you think for a moment that he is sporting all this rig alone?"

"You are right."

"We will look for the woman. Perhaps she may be responsible for the curious disappearance of Mr. Jones."

"You don't mean that both are infatuated with the same woman?"

"Oh, no! But Mr. Strong may know why Mr. Jones has disappeared. He may have had something to do with that disappearance. Only a woman's powerful hand can be seen in this game."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW ARRIVAL.

Old King Brady was positive in regard to his woman theory.

"Everything points to it," he said. "It will prove to be so. Men do not act so strangely as both Jones and Strong under any light influence. It is a woman's fine hand."

Harry did not disagree with his partner.

But the two Bradys went to work with much spirit.

They had started out upon the case without even the faintest shadow of a clew.

Superior methods of deduction and Old King Brady's re-

markable sagacity bade fair to put them on the right track.

They began to shadow Strong.

They followed the secretary from his office to his hotel and to his club.

Mrs. Jones came to New York day after day to confer with Strong about her missing husband's financial affairs.

She always went home in a very much distressed frame of mind.

Old King Brady became convinced that something was wrong.

So one evening he made his way to interview her at the steamer landing.

"Yes," confessed Mrs. Jones, "I have found my husband's business affairs in a mixed state. There is every reason to believe that he has badly mismanaged for a year past.

"I find much valuable stock mysteriously hypothecated. Large holdings of property have disappeared. I intend to have a thorough investigation."

"All this might bear out the theory of your husband's mental aberration," said the detective.

"It might, but I do not believe that of my husband. His brain was always remarkably clear."

"How do you account, then, for the bad state of his affairs?"

"I do not know yet. Perhaps the same person who killed him has been swindling him to an enormous degree. I feel as though there was a connection between the two matters."

"Do you trust the secretary?"

"Strong? Oh, he is an honest fellow. In any event, he would not have the power to accomplish what has been done."

"Then, you think your husband's large property in bad shape?"

"Indeed, I do. I much fear that from its estimate of several millions it will fall to less than a quarter of a million."

"Still, that will comfortably provide for you."

"Yes, oh yes! I do not care for wealth. If I could have my husband again I would be content to live in poverty."

Old King Brady joined Harry and repeated to him what had been learned.

"Queer!" said the young detective. "If he has gone away voluntarily the matter is explained. He has converted his property, leaving just enough for her comfortable support."

"Just so!"

"But, if not, then he has been unfortunate of late. Perhaps the secretary is feathering his own nest."

"Well, it's of no use to cogitate further. The best we can do is to shadow Strong until we get a clew."

This they proceeded to do.

But for days they followed him from the office to his hotel and to the club.

Nothing was seen which would cast the least shadow of suspicion upon him.

The Bradys had almost decided it a bad job and were disposed to give it up.

But, at the last moment, something odd happened.

Leaving the office one night Strong took a cab and was driven to the Windsor, where he had apartments.

A few moments later, the Bradys who were at his heels saw him salute a man who had just arrived.

The stranger was of remarkable appearance, and it could at once be seen that he came from some far end of the earth.

He was bronzed by long exposure to tropic suns, and wore a style of dress half military.

He was a man of past fifty years of age, erect bearing, gray hair and mustache, dark eyes and a handsome cast of features.

He was effusively greeted by Strong.

After writing his name on the register, the two men retired to Strong's apartments.

The Bradys were interested.

"I wonder who he is?" said Harry, curiously. "Let us see that name he has written on the register."

On the register page, in a handsome flowing hand, was written:

"SAMUEL GARDNER,
Cape Town, Africa."

The detectives read this entry with a sense of startled surprise.

Then they stared at each other.

A few moments later, in a retired corner of the hotel office, Harry exclaimed:

"Was not that the name of the man who quarrelled with Jones over thirty years ago?"

"It is the name given me by Mrs. Jones," said Old King Brady.

"Then, he is the man!"

"Yes."

"What a queer coincidence that he should appear in New York at this particular time."

"And how very friendly he was with Strong."

"It looks as if his coming was expected. They appear to be old friends."

"Yes."

The Bradys rapidly revolved this in their astute minds. A hundred vague theories were suggested.

Of course, there was no certainty that Colonel Sam Gardner's return from Africa had been caused by the mysterious and unknown fate of Holland Jones.

To have established connection between the two incidents would have required a tremendous stretch of fancy.

Yet, it was a coincidence.

Moreover, what puzzled the detectives was the seeming fact that Strong had been expecting the arrival of Gardner.

Were they simply friends or was it a prearranged thing for Gardner to come to New York, and if the latter, for what purpose?

The detectives chafed with inaction.

They could not find any way of overhearing the conversation between the two men.

"All we can do!" said Old King Brady, "is to keep low and track them everywhere. We shall yet find something for a clew."

"Do you think there can possibly be any connection between Gardner's coming and the strange disappearance of Holland Jones?"

"Time will tell."

The two men did not come downstairs again that night.

At a late hour the Bradys got assigned to rooms near them and went to bed.

The detectives were up early the next morning.

But it was late when Colonel Gardner came out of his room.

He passed the door of Strong's room, where he was yet fast asleep.

He went down into the office.

"I've got an idea," said Harry, drawing a note-book from his pocket.

"What?"

"I am going to interview him. I will assume to be a reporter."

"Good for you!"

Harry watched his chance and walked boldly up to his man.

"Ah, Colonel Gardner, I believe," he said politely.

The colonel raised his eyebrow in polite inquiry.

"That is my name!"

"I am a representative of the press. Can you not give me a story? You are just from Cape Town?"

"I am," replied Gardner.

"Ah, in what state were affairs when you left there?"

"Matters looked dubious. The Boers are very aggressive and there is a disposition to fight further encroachments of the English."

"You are in Her Majesty's service?"

"I have been for many years. I am retired at my own request."

"Then you have come back to America permanently?"

"America is my native land. I shall remain here a long time."

"You have been absent many years, Colonel Gardner. It is recalled that you were a friend of Holland Jones."

Gardner gave a start and his face changed color. For a moment he seemed startled.

Then he replied:

"Holland Jones and I were friends as young men."

"I suppose you have heard of his terrible fate?"

"Just an inkling. He was murdered, they say?"

"Yes, at his beach residence at Long Branch."

"I am pained to hear of it. We were old and warm friends."

"His wife still hopes that he is alive and will return."

Gardner shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he said listlessly. "That is the way with women. When a man is alive, they must treat him tyrannically. When

he is dead, then they profusely lament him. There is no nature so perverse and inconsistent as that of the female sex. Please remember, I am not individualizing."

Gardner spoke with great bitterness. Harry noted every slight inflection of his voice.

"They speak very highly of Mrs. Jones," he said, guardedly.

"Oh, yes," said Gardner with a yawn. "I've no doubt she is sincere and really loved her husband. Pardon me! I believe my breakfast hour is here!"

"One word more," cried Harry eagerly. "Will you enter into business pursuits in America?"

At this Gardner laughed.

"I think not," he said, "soldiers make poor business men. I am not the exception."

He bowed himself away politely.

Harry returned and made his report to Old King Brady. The old detective was impressed.

CHAPTER V.

A FRESH CLEW.

"It was easy to see that he had never forgiven Jones," said Harry. "Curiously, he was only slightly interested in Mrs. Jones."

"You must remember that thirty years has no doubt obliterated that love affair."

"Of course. Yet I have a queer conviction."

"What is it?"

"I am positive this fellow is concerned in the mysterious fate of Holland Jones."

"That is odd. Not a fact is there to substantiate it."

"No, but there is circumstantial evidence. He is a friend of Jones' private secretary. They are very intimate. It would not be hard to outline the skeleton of a plot."

"Oh, of course. It is possible that revenge has all these years rankled in his heart."

"Just so! I believe he has that sort of a nature. Men of that kind, Corsican like, will spend a lifetime in the consummating of a revenge."

"We will watch and wait."

Gardner came out from the dining room a short while later. He went out and entered a cab.

The detectives were unable to follow him.

They were contented to await his return. Meanwhile Strong arose, and after breakfast went down to the Fulton street office.

The detectives shadowed the place all day.

But nothing of note occurred.

For two days the Bradys followed useless clews.

They received a report from the chemist which confirmed Old King Brady's theory.

The blood stains in the bath house were those of an animal. They did not contain human corpuscles.

"This was a startling confirmation. Old King Brady said: "You may be sure that there is a deep game here somewhere. We have only secured the first faint inkling of the truth."

"It's a sticker," declared Harry. "On my word, I don't see how we are going to go further with it. We have exhausted all resources thus far."

"So it seems. Our only hope is that something may turn up."

And something did turn up that very night.

A telegram reached Old King Brady at his lodgings at midnight. It was from Mrs. Jones, with whom he had left his address.

Thus it read:

"James Brady, Detective:—

"Come at once to Long Branch. We have found a new clew. Yours,

"MRS. HOLLAND JONES."

"Well!" exclaimed Harry, "what do you think of that?"

"We must go down there by the first boat."

"That is six o'clock in the morning."

"Yes."

This was the best that could be done.

All surmise as to the nature and value of the clew was of little use. They could only wait.

And the morning boat took the Bradys back to the beach.

They were met by Mrs. Jones' carriage at the pier.

"Mrs. Jones is at the coroner's," declared the coachman. "She told me to drive you there."

"All right!" agreed Old King Brady. "Go ahead!"

The detectives leaped into the carriage.

In a short while they were at the coroner's. They entered and were greeted by the lady and the coroner.

Mrs. Jones' eyes were tear-stained and her face swollen.

"I have given up all hope," she said. "I know that my husband is dead."

"Do not say that," said Old King Brady. "You have not found the body."

"No, but we have found further evidence that the body was disposed of," she declared.

"Let us see that evidence."

The coroner lifted a rubber blanket and showed a heap of clothing on the table.

There was a suit of clothes and underwear. All were fearfully blood-stained.

The Bradys gazed at the grewsome exhibit.

"Are those your husband's clothes?" asked Harry.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Jones.

"Is this the suit he wore when he went down to the bath house?"

Mrs. Jones hesitated.

"Why, I suppose so," she said.

"I thought you told me he was dressed in white duck trousers and cheviot coat," said Old King Brady.

"Well, I must have been mistaken," said Mrs. Jones.

"These are his clothes."

"Where were they found?"

"A clam digger found them buried in the sand about half a mile below the bath house."

Old King Brady closely examined the blood stains.

Then he exchanged glances with Harry. It was all comprehensible to the detectives.

"Madam!" said Old King Brady quietly, "this discovery only confirms my first impression of this case. I believe your husband is still alive."

"Alive?" gasped both the coroner and Mrs. Jones.

"Yes, alive!"

"Zounds!" exclaimed the coroner. "What better proof of his death could be needed? He has been murdered."

"Very well," said Old King Brady, "accept any theory you choose, nothing will convince us, but the body of your husband."

"Perhaps that can be found on the beach also," said the coroner.

"I doubt it," said Old King Brady. "However, it will do no harm to institute a search. We will do so and report later."

The detectives went down to the beach. They again examined the bath houses.

Then they walked along the sandy beach for a full mile.

Every heap of sand was carefully examined. Every nook and crevice of the rocks was explored.

But no further trace of the missing man was found.

The Bradys finally turned about to walk back. They had discussed the new clew exhaustively.

"It is easy to understand," said Old King Brady, "if the murderer had sufficient method to daub the bath house with sheep's blood, he would also conceive the idea of concealing the clothes in the sand heap."

"Moreover, I believe these clothes were buried before the murder. We have evidence that Mr. Jones did not wear them that day."

"In that case—"

"The fake is exposed. In other words, Mr. Jones is his own murderer."

"But not a suicide."

"By no means. For some reason he desired to leave home under a cloud of mystery."

"And misapprehension."

"Yes."

"Well, he succeeded very well."

"So he did."

"Yet, there is still the possibility that he was murdered really."

"Yes."

"If so, it was in some other place, which the murderer has taken all these means to conceal."

"He must be a cunning fellow."

"To be sure. Yet, I am still confident that Jones is alive somewhere in hiding."

Thus theorizing the Bradys strolled along the beach.

Suddenly Harry called the old detective's attention to a

light steam yacht which was trying to make an anchorage just off shore.

"Somebody is coming ashore," he said.

"That is plain."

"There comes the boat. There are two men in it." Harry shaded his eyes with his hand.

Then he gave a great start.

"Jupiter!" he gasped. "Get out of sight here somewhere, partner. We know those two men. They are David Strong and Colonel Gardner."

Old King Brady was surprised.

"What?" he ejaculated, "are you sure of that?"

"I am."

"Your eyesight is good?"

"It never fails me."

"What can those two rogues want here? Can you guess?"

"No; that is for us to find out."

The detectives crouched down behind a huge boulder. The row-boat came through the surf and was beached.

The two occupants leaped out. Strong secured the boat with a small rope and anchor.

Then leisurely the two yachtsmen came up the beach. They halted within a few yards of the detectives.

"There is the house," said Strong. "It is one of the finest places at the beach."

"Yes, it looks to be a fine place," declared Gardner. "So that is where lives the woman I once loved. She is now a widow. I wonder would she remember me."

"Why don't you call on her?"

"Do you think that would be vengeance just now? Oh, you do not know. She would hardly care to meet me just now."

Gardner grated his teeth and then rejoined:

"However, I am going to walk nearer. All this may seem like nonsense to you, Strong, but I can tell you that a love which has burned in one's bosom for thirty years without quenching is no light matter."

"Go ahead, partner," said Strong. "I will wait for you."

Strong strolled down to the water's edge and got into the boat.

He reclined upon the thwarts and gazed seaward. Gardner walked slowly along the beach.

All this had interested the Bradys very much.

They followed Colonel Gardner almost to the shadow of the bath house. Here the colonel sat down in the cover of a boulder and continued to watch the house.

He had not sat there long before a startling thing happened.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

Colonel Gardner's eyes were fixed upon the house. The bath house buildings shut him from the view of anyone coming up the beach from Long Branch.

The detectives were hovering behind a sand dune.

They were waiting for the next move in the game.

And it came very suddenly and unexpectedly.

From their position they had an unobstructed view of the beach for some few hundred yards beyond.

Suddenly Harry gave a start.

A figure had come into view on the strip of beach.

It was a woman.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young detective, "do you see her?"

Old King Brady gasped.

"It is Mrs. Jones!"

"She is coming to find us."

"She will walk right onto Gardner before she knows it."

The Bradys almost held their breath. What would be the outcome of this?

They were powerless to prevent the meeting even had they desired to do so.

So they waited with interest.

Mrs. Jones came along at a rapid pace. She seemed to be looking anxiously for the detectives.

Straight on she came until her crunching footsteps caused Gardner to turn his head.

At the same moment she saw him.

He was upon his feet in an instant. There they stood staring at each other strangely.

Mrs. Jones was white as driven snow. Gardner was flushed and hot with excitement.

One word dropped from his lips.

"Harriet!"

She did not at once speak. Gradually the color came back into her face.

"Surely, you have not forgotten me, Harriet, though thirty years have passed and my hair is gray, while yours is still fresh and young."

"Have you come for vengeance?" she asked.

"Why that question?"

"Because if you have you are forestalled. He is dead!"

"I have heard the whole story," said Gardner. "I arrived only yesterday and my old-time schoolmate, David Strong, who waits for me in the boat back there, told me all."

"Then I can add nothing."

"Unless you so choose!"

Her face suddenly flushed.

"The past is buried," she said. "It can never be resurrected. I hope you have not come here for that."

He seemed to shudder.

"That was not what brought me to America," he said. "I have had no news of you in a score of years. I tired of that terrible tropical life and longed to once more see my native land. I did not know that you were even alive yet. I will confess that my first thought when I sailed into the harbor of New York was of those old days of that might have been, which never was, and—alas! never can be."

Her eyes fell.

"Friendship is more enduring and less torturesome than love," she said.

"Then we may yet claim friendship?"

He spoke eagerly.

She lifted her eyes and replied:

"I have always hoped to have you as a friend. I know that I once wrung your heart. I have suffered as well as you."

"Then you did love me—"

She put up her hand.

"Love is a subject of which we must never speak," she said. "I married Holland Jones. Society called it a fitting match. I have done my duty by my husband and children. God has not asked more of any human being."

The Bradys had listened to all this with the deepest of interest.

It was easy to understand the situation now.

It was the old story of a lovers' quarrel, of separation, and a hasty marriage for petty revenge, and years upon years of bitter repenting at leisure.

"They tell me—your—husband was murdered," ventured Gardner.

"He was the victim of an assassin," replied Mrs. Jones. "I am doing all in my power to avenge his fate."

"I trust you will succeed."

Gardner began to move away. The woman trembled like an aspen.

He backed slowly away. She looked seaward. No word of farewell was spoken.

Presently he turned sharply on his heel and strode rapidly away. Then Mrs. Jones, with an effort, turned to walk up the path to her home.

"Follow her!" said Old King Brady. "I will rejoin you later."

"All right."

The old detective crept after Gardner. The South African traveler joined Strong, and pushing out into the surf, rowed back to the yacht.

Presently its sails filled and it glided away.

Then Old King Brady returned to the bath houses. He walked up the plank walk to the house above.

Mrs. Jones and Harry sat on the piazza. She was very pale.

"You were seeking us, Mrs. Jones?" asked the detective.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Jones in a weak voice. "And while doing so I chanced upon a surprising adventure."

"Mrs. Jones has told me of her meeting with Colonel Gardner," said Harry.

Old King Brady raised his eyebrows.

"Ah!" he said, "you did not expect to meet him here at this time?"

"It was a great surprise to me."

"Do you note any coincidence in his visit to America at this time?"

"No. I ascribe no motives to Colonel Gardner. He is thoroughly a man of honor. Besides, he sailed from Cape Town before this crime occurred."

"Now, Mrs. Jones," said Old King Brady pointedly, "I want to ask you a very personal question."

"I will answer it," she said.

"Very good! Tell me if you ever really loved Colonel Gardner?"

"When I was young before I married Holland Jones, we were betrothed."

"Ah, what broke the betrothal?"

With an effort she replied:

"I know it is necessary for me to tell you the secret of my life. There was a quarrel between Sam and me. We separated and I married Holland Jones in a fit of pique. I was wrong. The truth came out afterwards. An atrocious falsehood of my husband, a game of deception caused the estrangement."

"I did not learn this until after my marriage. I despised my husband thereafter, though I have always been a true wife. When Colonel Gardner learned the truth he confronted my husband. There was to have been a duel. I frustrated it. Then Colonel Gardner went to Africa. That is all."

The Bradys were silent.

Their sympathy went out to this noble woman who had suffered in silence for so many years.

A short while later they were about to take their leave when Mrs. Jones exclaimed:

"Oh, I forgot the matter which I was hurrying to see you about. Just now I received in the mail a very odd letter. Will you read it?"

The detectives took the missive.

The paper was of a cheap variety. It was post marked at New York. Old King Brady studied the chirography.

It was coarse and irregular. There was no disguising the fact that it was an assumed hand.

Thus the letter read:

"Deer Maddam:—

"If you want yure husband's boddy yu can hev it fer one thousand dollars cash. If you don't take this offer we will burn it too ashes. Meet me at the bath house Friday night at ten o'clock with the money. If yu try any game yu won't find me there. Yures trooly,

"THE MAN OF IRON."

Very carefully the two detectives studied this epistle.

"Had I not better accept those terms and recover the body?" asked Mrs. Jones anxiously. "We can trap those fellows afterwards."

Old King Brady smiled grimly.

"Be there at that hour if you choose," he said, "but you'll find nobody there."

"You think so?"

"I know it!"

"Why not?"

"Easy enough! This letter is a very clever blind to make you think your husband was murdered."

"Murdered!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones testily. "Is there not every evidence that he was murdered?"

The Bradys hesitated.

Then Old King Brady said:

"We may as well tell you the truth, Mrs. Jones," he said. "We have pretty conclusive evidence that your husband was not murdered."

"But—the blood stains—his disappearance—"

"Is all a hoax!"

Mrs. Jones was mystified.

"How do you make that out?" she asked.

"Very simply. We have taken the blood to a chemist. He has found that the corpuscles are not those of a human being, but of some animal, possibly a sheep."

The effect of this upon Mrs. Jones was startling.

A strange light shone in her eyes.

She leaned forward and in a rigid voice said:

"Are you very sure of this?"

"We are!"

She arose and walked up and down the piazza. This was no ordinary woman as the detectives realized.

Finally she halted.

"I understand you now," she said, "but I interpose no objection to your proceeding to the furthest extent of the law. I want justice."

"And you shall have it," said Old King Brady. "But tell us: Have you an inkling of the identity of the woman in this case?"

"The woman?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Jones' lips were white. With an effort she composed herself.

"I have had reason to suspect a variety actress in New York. A woman who goes under the name of Fannie Leslie."

The Bradys gave a start.

"Enough," declared Old King Brady. "We have the clew. We know the woman. Keep dark and wait. You shall have justice, Mrs. Jones."

CHAPTER VII.

SURPRISING DEVELOPMENTS.

A few moments later the Bradys were on their way to get the boat to New York.

"What did I tell you?" said Old King Brady triumphantly. "I knew well there was a woman in this case."

"Well, I am glad we have located her," said Harry. "I think we shall get along rapidly now."

"Indeed, we will."

"One thing puzzles me, though."

"What?"

"I cannot understand the friendship of this man Gardner for Strong. In my opinion, the secretary is a dishonest rascal."

"Perhaps Gardner does not know that. He has declared that Strong was an old schoolmate and probably trusts him on that score."

"Ah, well, we may look for developments very shortly. Let us look this Leslie woman up first of all."

"I believe she has been playing at an uptown theatre last winter."

"Yes, she frequents the Waldorf-Astoria. We will have no trouble in finding her, I am sure."

The detectives reached New York in the middle of the afternoon.

They at once proceeded to headquarters to make a report.

As they entered, the chief cried:

"By Jove! I am glad you fellows have come. I have a clew for you."

"A clew to the Long Branch mystery?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"A woman came here to-day who says she has positive information of the disposition of Mr. Jones' body by his assassins."

The detectives were astounded.

"Who is the woman?"

"She is a very beautiful actress. Her name is Fannie Leslie."

"Fannie Leslie!" gasped Old King Brady. Then he looked at Harry.

"Tell us all about it," he said to the chief as he sank into a chair.

"Miss Leslie says that a friend of hers overheard a very important conversation between two men in a Broadway cafe. They made a complete revelation of the murder which was committed by two Bowery crooks for the sake of robbery."

"And the body—"

"Is sunk in a marsh about two miles from Elberon. The spot is marked by a dead tree, and is at the mouth of a salt water creek."

The two detectives received this information with strange sensations.

Here was a development in this strangest of strange cases which put a new face on matters.

"And the Leslie woman brought that story here?" asked Old King Brady.

"Yes. What do you think of it?"

"We have nothing to say just now. Before taking further steps we will try and recover that body."

"Good! I hope you will succeed."

"One word more," said Harry. "Where is Miss Leslie stopping?"

"No. — West Thirty-fourth street. She is shortly to go on a trip abroad."

The two detectives arose.

"Report as soon as possible," said the chief.

"We will do so!"

They left the office.

They boarded an uptown Broadway car and alighted at Herald Square.

It was no difficult matter to find the number on Thirty-fourth street. It was a fashionable boarding house.

A trim maid answered the ring at the bell.

The Bradys sent up their cards.

Presently word came back:

"Miss Leslie will see you in her apartments."

A moment later the detectives were in a daintily furnished room. The odor of violets was in the air.

Miss Leslie, the petite actress, the favorite of the foot-lights, sat in an easy chair, while a couple of maids flitted back and forth in an adjoining room.

"I can only repeat the story I gave to the chief," said the actress. "A friend of mine who does not want his name coupled with the affair, told me of it."

"I thought it of sufficient value to give to the officers of the law. I hope it will afford a full solution of the mystery."

"Will you confide your friend's name to us?" asked Old King Brady.

"Under no circumstances," replied the actress.

"But you are thwarting the ends of justice."

"In what manner?"

"It would be of advantage to us to consult with your friend and learn just what his opinion is."

"His opinion is mine."

"Yes, but he could perhaps give us a clew as to the identity of the two assassins."

"No; I tried to get that from him. He declared it was impossible. He does not wish to be mixed up in the affair."

"Do you know any of the principals?"

The woman hesitated.

"Well, I once knew Mr. and Mrs. Jones. It was when I was in society and before I went on the stage."

"This, then, is all the clew you can give us?"

"It is."

The detectives took their departure.

"Well," said Harry brusquely. "What do you think of it?"

"I am puzzled. If there is really a body buried at the point named, whose can it be?"

"Perhaps a substitute. Maybe an anatomical subject."

"In that case it will be mutilated beyond recognition."

"Yes."

The next morning early the Bradys again went down to Long Branch.

They procured the coroner and made search for the locality described by Fannie Leslie.

There was no difficulty whatever in finding it.

The swamp was dragged and soon gave up its secret. From the dank grasses there emerged the stiffened and naked corpse of a man.

He was of the same height and build as Mr. Jones.

But the head and face were battered beyond recognition.

Both hands and both feet had been cut off and were missing. The body was so stained and discolored with putrefaction that positive identification could not be made.

But it was taken to the coroner's and kept for future use.

The report spread like wildfire.

A tremendous sensation was created by the news that the

body of the missing millionaire had been found in a marsh.

The mystery of his disappearance now seemed solved to the public mind.

But it is hardly necessary to say that the Bradys were not convinced.

They were exceedingly interested, however, to know whose body it was, if not that of Jones.

If an anatomical subject, the purveyors of it had certainly succeeded in obtaining a man of about the right size to compare with Jones.

Mrs. Jones viewed the remains but was unable to identify them.

And thus matters stood.

At this juncture a very strange thing happened.

There was another disappearance.

This time it was David Strong, the private secretary of the murdered man.

He had dropped suddenly out of sight, leaving no trace behind him. The lawyers who had taken charge of Mr. Jones' estate, found a good reason for this.

Valuable securities of the missing millionaire's had been pledged by the dishonest secretary.

It was found that nearly every available bit of property had been converted into cash, either by Strong or Jones, and the family was left with only Mrs. Jones' private fortune of less than one hundred thousand dollars.

That Strong had departed with his yacht was certain, for the craft was missing.

Then other facts began to come to light.

It was discovered that he had long enjoyed the fair favor of one of the higher class demi-monde belles of New York, known as Janet Foster.

The Foster woman was also missing.

Putting two and two together, it was easy to form conclusions.

Ugly rumors began to circulate that Strong might be concerned in the murder of Jones.

Thus matters were, when one day, as the Bradys sat in the office conferring with the chief a visitor was announced.

As he entered, the Bradys gave a thrilled start.

He was no other than Colonel Gardner.

The South African traveler quickly stated the purpose of his visit.

"I have come here to seek detective service," he said. "I want to say that David Strong was always my friend and up to the present moment I have believed him a man of honor."

"But I now know that he is a scoundrel. I believe that Mrs. Jones should have justice. She has been robbed of her husband and her property and Strong may be at the bottom of it all."

"I want a smart detective to assist me in tracking down the scoundrel. But it must be a secret mission and Mrs. Jones must never know of my connection with it."

Old King Brady turned and said:

"You are Colonel Gardner?"

"Yes."

"You were once a suitor of Mrs. Jones'."

The colonel flushed.

"That is of no importance," he said.

"I speak of it to let you know that we are possessed of all the facts in this case. We are doing all that is possible to solve the mystery."

The colonel's face lit up.

"And you have prospect of success?"

"Yes."

"Good! I wish to say that I am a wealthy man and willing to pay a large reward."

"That is not necessary," said Old King Brady. "We are in this game to win. I think a few days now will see some surprising developments."

"I shall wait with deep interest. If you wish to see me at any time, I am at the Waldorf-Astoria."

"We will bear it in mind."

With this Colonel Gardner took his departure

CHAPTER VIII.

PICKING UP THE THREADS.

"There are just two honest people in this whole affair," said Old King Brady, "and they are Colonel Gardner and Mrs. Jones."

"And but for the dishonesty of the supposed victim of this case they would have been living happily together to-day and all these events would never have happened."

"It is certainly a pathetic as well as interesting case," said the chief. "Now, where do you think Strong has gone?"

"I have a theory," said Old King Brady.

"What is it?"

The old detective knit his brows.

"There is no doubt but that the body found in the marsh, and of whose location Miss Leslie so adroitly gave us information, is a substitute.

"We will assume that. Jones then is alive and is hiding somewhere. He proposes to bury his identity as Jones forever.

"He will go abroad with this actress and live an entirely new life. His wife and family he will never further concern himself about.

"This is the plot. Now, Strong's case is parallel in one respect. He also makes his exit with a woman of questionable character. But he leaves no family behind him.

"Now, how do we know but that Strong and his employer are in collusion in this scheme. The disposition of property shows that Strong really had power of attorney.

"There are other bits of proof. Strong has departed to some agreed upon point with his yacht. There he will, perhaps, be joined by Jones and his fair charmer. Then they have the world before them.

"Strong having no family to sacrifice can defy society. Holland Jones, the millionaire, is dead, murdered by thieves and his body cast into a marsh. Resurrected, it is buried and his obituary written.

"But Holland Jones alive sails to a far land, lives under another name, enjoys a new life and has forever wiped out the past and the family for which he ceased to care."

The chief and Harry listened spellbound.

"On my word, Brady," said the chief, "that is a wonderful hypothesis. I believe you have hit the truth."

"Allowing it to be the truth, what course may we pursue?" asked Harry.

"So far, no enormous crime has been committed," said Old King Brady. "It is not murder, but a villainous bit of deception.

"Now, I am interested enough in the matter to track down the deceiver and bring him back to his family."

"Perhaps it is a mercy to them to allow him to go," said the chief.

"There is redress for Mrs. Jones in the divorce courts," said Old King Brady. "Our immediate course, however, is simply to shadow Fannie Leslie.

"When she leaves town we must be on her track, for she will surely guide us to the hiding place of Jones."

"Correct!" cried Harry, "the case is simmered down simply to tracking down Jones and Strong."

"There you are!" agreed the old detective. "The mystery of the bath house is certainly solved."

So, indeed, it seemed.

But the case was not yet finished. At least so the Bradys were pleased to decide.

The identity of the unknown man found in the marsh had not as yet been established.

He might or might not have been an anatomical subject placed there to deceive the detectives.

There was no certainty that he was not the victim of a foul murder. Oh, no, the case was by no means solved. The Bradys saw great developments ahead.

When they left the chief's office it was with a well defined plan of action.

They knew that Fannie Leslie was the one now most likely to lead them to a solution of the mystery.

If she was really in the game with Jones she would make an attempt to join him sooner or later.

This the Bradys believed would be their opportunity.

They knew that she lived at an uptown hotel in the fashionable quarters of the city.

It was in order, therefore, to shadow her closely.

They took an uptown car and proceeded at once to this hotel.

Making inquiry at the office the Bradys learned a startling fact.

"Miss Leslie has gone," declared the clerk.

"Gone?" gasped Old King Brady.

"Yes, sir!"

"Where?"

"I don't know, sir. Out on the road again, I suppose."

"Was not her departure rather sudden?"

"Oh, I don't know. You can't tell anything about theatrical people. They are birds of passage, here to-day, somewhere else to-morrow."

"I guess that's right," said the old detective. "Did she take all her effects?"

"Yes, her trunks, two maids, a parrot and two dogs. Everything is gone."

"Whew!" exclaimed Harry, "She traveled in style."

The clerk nodded in a knowing way.

"Why shouldn't she? Rich old cove to pay her bills. Spend money like water. Anybody could live like that."

"Well, I should say! Where do you suppose she has gone?"

"I haven't the least idea. If you talk with the porters maybe they can tell you what express company took her trunks and to what depot."

"Thanks," said Old King Brady. "We'll try it."

The Bradys now descended upon the hotel porters.

They had better luck than they had hoped.

"It was the West Side Express Company took her trunks, boss," said one of the porters. "I remember Jeff Smith was the driver."

"Where can we find him?"

"Go right out here to the corner and you'll find their office. Jest ask for Jeff Smith."

The detectives lost no time.

They found the express office and inquired for Smith. As luck had it he was present.

"Yas," he said, "I remember the leddy well. We took the trunks over to wharf E in the North River."

"Ah! What line of steamer goes out from that wharf?"

"Don't none go out from there that I know of."

"And you left the trunks there?"

"Yes."

"But is there no vessel makes a landing there?"

"'Taint no passenger line that I knows on. Do you, Mister Jenks?"

"Nope! Schooners sometimes docks there, that's all."

"And that's all you know about it?"

"All, boss!"

The Bradys were puzzled. They lost no time in boarding a downtown car.

They made their way to wharf E. They found it partly occupied with piles of lumber.

A schooner lay in the slip.

The Bradys at once made inquiries of every lounge and longshoreman on the wharf.

For a long time they were unable to hit on a clew. Then they found the wharf watchman.

"Oh, yes!" he said, "I recomember now, that some trunks was dumped here an' a feller settled wharfage wid me an' took ther stuff away in a small boat. That's all."

"Humph! When was this?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

The detectives looked at each other with dismay.

"We are beaten," said Harry.

"No," said Old King Brady resolutely. "We'll not give up yet."

The Bradys made all possible inquiries about the boat and its occupants, but nothing further could be learned.

"I could only see that it was a small boat with a pair of oars," said the watchman. "It mought hev been a yacht tender."

The Bradys finally left the wharf. They now proceeded to visit the steamer office.

But no person answering to Fannie Leslie's name or description had engaged passage.

The detectives even went to Jersey City and looked up the Pullman car lists on all southbound trains. Not a clew was found.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" growled Harry. "This is too bad. There must be a clew somewhere."

"Well, let's do some reasoning," said Old King Brady. "We know that she has left New York. Her trunks were taken from a free wharf by a yacht's tender. Now, what are we to assume?"

"That they were taken aboard some private vessel."

"Just so!"

"Then she has gone with Strong aboard his yacht. You can be sure of that," declared Harry.

"Why Strong's yacht?"

"He has a yacht and he has no doubt employed it as a safe means of flight."

"But we are led to believe that Strong's inamorata was Janet Foster, the concert hall singer."

"Ah! I see the whole thing now. It is even money that all four have gone on Strong's yacht. Jones and his lady love, and Strong with his."

Old King Brady was bound to admit that there was logic in this assumption.

Yet, there were other reasons for disbelieving it. There was as yet no evidence that Strong and his employer were in collusion.

Thus they were engaged in consultation, when suddenly a voice sounded at Old King Brady's elbow.

"Ah, gentlemen, I am glad to come upon you. I am sure you are trying to solve the mystery of Long Branch."

It was Colonel Gardner.

"That is the truth, sir," replied the old detective as he pressed the colonel's hand, "but we are much befogged."

"Indeed, I cannot wonder. There is no doubt but that Holland Jones has proved himself the greatest rascal of the day."

"He has certainly created the greatest tangle of mystery on record for many a day," said Harry.

"Well," said Gardner, "perhaps I can help you. I have just a faint clew."

CHAPTER IX.

A HIDDEN CRIME.

The detectives heard this with the deepest of interest.

"You are just the man we are looking for if you have any sort of a clew," said Old King Brady.

"I am sorry to say it is but slight—and you may not esteem it of value."

"Do not say that. Sometimes the slightest clues bring about the greatest results."

"Well, I will say that from the first I have been deeply interested in this case. I was a school friend of Mrs. Jones, and in this, her hour of trouble, I am trying to serve her."

"We understand that," said Old King Brady. "She has told us the story of her past life."

"No nobler woman or truer wife ever lived," said Gardner.

"That is beyond doubt."

"Now, I mean to devote my life to righting this wrong put upon her."

"A noble purpose."

"No, it is a duty I owe her, for the sake of old friendship. I have been busy myself playing detective, and I have stumbled upon a fact which may prove important."

"Ah!" said Old King Brady with interest. "What is it?"

"It is a fact, no doubt known to you, that David Strong has had full charge of Mr. Jones' business for some months past."

"Yes."

"Now, Strong has greatly disappointed me. I always thought him a man of honor and principle. We were once warm friends."

"But I have now discovered that he has degenerated, and has, in fact, been living a double life for a number of years past. I am sure there is a woman at the bottom of this."

"Yes," said Old King Brady, "her name is Janet Foster."

"Ah, you know it, then. Now, I have learned through Mrs. Jones of the important visit of a man from the West, by the name of Stephen Cardozo, who owned vast mines in Arizona with Jones. Indeed, this visit concerned these mines. Cardozo sought to purchase Jones' right in them. There was a terrific quarrel over the matter."

"Cardozo came down to Long Branch to see Jones. Mrs. Jones remembered the incident well. Jones questioned the right of Cardozo in the mines. The Mexican threatened Jones with law proceedings."

"Thus matters stood. In fact, there was a rumor that if Cardozo carried out his threat it would carry Jones to the wall. But the lawsuit never came off."

"Jones remained master of the mines. The stocks boomed. The confidence of the people was restored and all blew over."

"And Cardozo—"

"Oh, he dropped from sight. Nobody ever saw him again, either in New York or Arizona."

The detective gazed hard at Gardner.

There was a long silence.

"Well," said Harry finally, "you will admit that was strange."

"A great many people thought so."

"What are we to assume from it?" asked Old King Brady.

"The chief thing is that a man who was prominent in a great financial project mysteriously disappeared. It was to the great advantage of Jones that he did so."

"And did Jones then become full owner of the Arizona property?"

"That is what he is to-day."

"But, Cardozo—"

Gardner lowered his voice.

"A body was conveniently found in the marshy shore below Long Branch, was it not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It was assumed that it was the body of Holland Jones who was supposed to have been murdered in his bath house."

"Yes."

"What if some mark was found on that body to identify it with the missing Mexican?"

For a moment the Bradys stared at the South African.

It was all plain enough to them.

"I see," said Old King Brady softly, "the woman in the case was not the sole reason for Jones' departure from the scene."

"No. He is a murderer as true as we stand here this moment. That Mexican Cardozo was put out of the way. Jones feared an inquiry which must some time come."

"He saw a chance to seek new scenes and start a new life. He resolved to break from his family, his home and his friends and in such a manner as to be forever effectual."

"He conceived the plan of inventing a murder and mysterious disposition of his body, cleverly planning that his victim's body should be mistaken for his."

"Now he has taken his wealth and the mistress of his heart and fled. Fortunately, his devilish plan has betrayed itself to us."

Colonel Gardner spoke slowly and convincingly.

The Bradys were as well assured of the truth as he was.

"There is the whole case," said Old King Brady. "but how shall we prove that the disfigured and unrecognizable body is that of Cardozo?"

"I have taken a step to provide for that," said Gardner.

"Ah, what is it?"

"In the first place, we have a very careful description of the body. I visited the morgue and verified it. The most likely marks of identification are tattooed anchors on the breast, and a scar of a bullet wound in the right shoulder."

"Now, I have written to Arizona to learn if these marks were carried by Cardozo to anyone's knowledge. If so, then we have the body identified."

"It is easy to see that it is not that of Jones."

"Just so!"

"And there is where the assassin has tripped himself up. It is strange that the criminal, no matter how cunning, always leaves some little thing undone which reveals his hand. Now, if Jones had let the body alone—"

"He might have carried the day. At least, he could have held the mystery unsolved."

"Exactly!"

"Well," said Colonel Gardner, "I am glad that you consider this clew of value."

"Indeed, we do. Moreover, it is an added incentive to pursue the bird. Now, that we know he is a murderer, the

game is worth the effort. Otherwise, we would hardly deem it game worth our efforts to chase an absconding husband guilty of nothing more."

"Of course," agreed the colonel. "But you will find that Jones is a criminal worthy of your best efforts."

"We are assured of that. But, at present, we are badly off. He has slipped us."

"Ah, perhaps I can help you again."

"Indeed!" cried the detectives eagerly. "That will be a pleasure."

"I can only offer an assumption, however. I cannot assure you that it is a fact."

"We are glad to get even a theory."

"Well, Mrs. Jones is of the opinion that her husband has gone to Florida."

"To Florida?"

"Yes. She recalls that he had spent much time studying coast maps of Florida for some while before taking his leave."

The detectives gazed at each other.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry. "That is the idea."

"That is where he has gone."

"Strong has gone thither with the yacht. Perhaps Jones and Fannie Leslie are on board also."

"This is only an inference," said Gardner. "It is not positive."

"Yet is logical," said Old King Brady. "We will accept it as a sure thing."

"I beg you—"

"Enough! It is all right. We are going to take chances."

"You are going to Florida?"

"Yes."

"But—you will get there long before the yacht. You will have to wait for it."

"That is all right. We can go to Savannah and perhaps take a sail up the coast in the hope of meeting them."

"A scant chance."

"Not so very. I do not doubt that they will keep in near the land, taking advantage of the sounds of lagoons to work their way along the coast. The coast line of the Carolinas is well cut up with these."

Gardner knit his brows.

"I am anxious to co-operate," he said. "How would it do for me to hire a fast launch and start in pursuit?"

The Bradys exchanged glances.

They saw at once the possibilities of this plan.

"Hold on," said Old King Brady, "I like that plan myself."

"Very good!" agreed the colonel. "They have a day's start of us."

"Yes."

Theirs is a sailing craft. Running before the wind with everything in their favor they cannot be two hundred miles away."

"No."

"If we get a fast boat we ought to cover that distance in

ten hours. Then we ought to overhaul them almost two miles to their one."

"If we don't run by them."

"If they keep well in toward the shore there is little danger of that."

"True enough."

"Is it a bargain?"

"It is."

"Come on!" cried Gardner. "I have a friend in Brooklyn who owns the Hornet, one of the fast steam yachts on the Sound. We can charter her all right."

"Crew and all."

"Certainly! Never mind the expense. I am a millionaire."

"Nevertheless, we insist on paying our share," said Old King Brady.

"As you please! Now, gentlemen, I can be ready in two hours after securing the yacht."

"We are ready as we stand."

"Good! That is the way I like to do business. The South African sleeps on his spear the year round. He carries no change of clothing, and has no excess baggage to pay and is always ready. That is philosophy."

"And here is a Brooklyn ferryboat," said Old King Brady. "Let us take time by the forelock just as does the South African."

CHAPTER X.

THE CHASE.

With a jolly laugh, the three men boarded the ferry.

When they reached Brooklyn they took a car to the Wallabout. Here, at a private yard, they found the owner of the fast steam yacht.

"Certainly you may have her, Gardner," he said. "She is in commission and all ready. One hundred and fifty dollars per day will run her. I desire no profit."

Four men were in the crew of the Hornet.

They were notified and the engineer quickly got up steam.

The Bradys went aboard at once. But it took Gardner an hour to arrange his affairs.

In about two hours' time, though, the Hornet dropped down under the Brooklyn Bridge and stood out for the Narrows.

She was, indeed, a fast boat.

Twenty-five miles an hour was easy work for her and she ploughed along like a locomotive on a down grade track.

Out past the Narrows they ran out into the open sea.

The yacht's course was shaped southward, and always in sight of land.

Darkness soon settled down and the voyagers adjourned to the cabin which was warm and cozy.

As it was hardly likely that they would overhaul the sailing yacht that night, they gave no thought to signalling any craft which they ran by.

But the next morning they were on deck with glasses leveled and studying every sail.

They were now far down to the mouth of the Chesapeake. And here was a problem.

It was by no means improbable that the fugitive might coast up the Chesapeake some ways and even venture to visit some of the coast towns.

The Hornet hung about the mouth of the great bay for some while, but finally Old King Brady said:

"No. We'll take chances. Go ahead! They are yet below us somewhere along the coast."

Leaving Old Point Comfort they began to draw near the Hatteras seas. Here they drew in nearer shore.

Hatteras inlet afforded many inside passages for a light craft.

In any one of these they believed they would find their birds.

And it seemed as if the hand of Providence was guiding them.

They had met and hailed and studied many craft.

Fishermen and pleasure seekers all had been interviewed.

But none had given them a bit of a clew. None had seen anything of Strong's yacht.

But, suddenly in one of the reaches of Hatteras Inlet, while the Hornet was feeling her way in shallow water, Harry gave a sharp cry.

"There she is!" he cried.

"What! Where?" cried Old King Brady and Gardner.

All eyes then saw a trim yacht drawing away before the wind through an inner lagoon.

It was Strong's yacht.

It was the same craft that the Bradys had seen at Long Branch when Strong and Gardner paid their visit to the Elberon beach.

"That is the Janet," cried Gardner excitedly. "It is Strong's boat."

"And they are all on deck. Is not that Jones?"

"It is Jones!"

"I see Strong!"

"There are two women!"

"Two more men are aft."

"They are part of the crew."

Harry had procured a glass and was studying the deck of the flying yacht.

Then a startling thing happened.

"Ah, they see us!"

"They cannot know us."

"No, but they are suspicious. See, Jones has gone into the cabin. They are putting on more sail."

"After them!" cried Gardner feverishly. "We must not let them escape."

The Hornet's course was instantly changed.

She shot in to the lagoon through the narrow channel. Then she glided forward like a meteor.

The Janet could not hold with such speed. The Hornet rapidly bore down upon her.

There was a commotion on the deck of the sailing yacht.

The ladies were seen to vanish into the cabin.

Only one man beside the four men of the crew was seen on deck. This was Strong.

Nearer the Hornet drew.

Now they were within easy hailing distance. Gardner stood in the Hornet's forechains.

He could plainly identify Strong's features. The latter also recognized him.

"Hello, David!" shouted Gardner. "Pull in sail. I want to speak with you."

"I'm in a hurry, Sam," replied Strong. "Steer off or you'll be aground. The water is too shallow here for you."

This was true.

The Hornet drew full two feet more water on account of her engines. But Gardner thought nothing of this and had only one purpose in view.

"What are you running away for, David?"

"What are you chasing me for?"

"I want to speak with you."

"We are speaking."

"Well, where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"Who is aboard with you?"

"Some friends."

"Is Holland Jones there?"

"Why, he is dead. Why don't you go back and congratulate his widow?"

Gardner's face flushed slightly, but he gave little heed to this taunt.

"Because I want to see Jones," he said.

"You'll have to go to another world for that. Jones is dead."

"Dead to the world, perhaps."

"Yes, and dead in reality."

"Pshaw. I saw him a moment ago on your deck."

This shot told.

"You lie!" cried Strong, angrily.

"That was a friend of mine from England. I can tell you, Sam, you're on the wrong track. You want to switch off."

"Pull down your sails and come about," cried Gardner. "We are going to pay you a visit."

"Never! Keep off or it will be the worse for you!"

"Look out," cried Old King Brady sharply.

There was a sharp report and a bullet sang past Gardner's ear. The colonel's face flushed with anger.

"You contemptible coward!" he shouted. "I'll see you for that."

But just at that moment the Hornet shivered, seemed to check her speed and then there was a shock and the boat stood still while the screw madly churned the sea.

"My soul!" cried the colonel wildly. "We have run aground. It is a sand bar."

The engineer changed the gong wildly and shut off steam. The crew came rushing forward.

A yell of derision came from those on board the Janet.

The latter craft stood away now rapidly and soon was beyond hailing distance.

While the Hornet was hung up fast in the embrace of the sand bar.

Here was a predicament which was little relished by the pursuers.

They were in a lonely channel far from any coast settlement and in water seldom traversed by a sailing craft.

The Hornet was certainly fast aground on the treacherous sand bar.

"Reverse the engines," cried Colonel Gardner. "We must get off in some way."

This was done.

But it was done in vain.

The boat was stuck fast and all effort to move her was useless.

Here was a bad scrape.

Colonel Gardner looked at the Bradys and said:

"We are beaten."

"Not yet," said Old King Brady.

"What do you mean? Do you see a way out of the scrape?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I mean that we should be by no means discouraged so far as the escape of our birds is concerned. To be sure they have given us the slip. But we have gained a great deal.

"We have established the fact beyond all question that Holland Jones is alive. Our theories have all been borne out exactly as formed."

"That is true," agreed Gardner. "But they have got away from us."

"That is all right. They may elude us this time. But we shall catch them yet."

"Oh, I hope so!"

"You may be sure of it."

"It will be a matter of the keenest satisfaction to me to bring Holland Jones back to New York."

"We will certainly do so!"

"But we cannot if we remain here."

"Certainly not. But there is no need of our staying here. To be sure the boat is stuck just now. Is it not possible that she will come off all right when the tide rises?"

Gardner gave a start.

"I never thought of that," he cried. "The tide is out."

"Just so."

"She will float again when it comes in."

"Of course she will."

The colonel's spirits rose.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "they have not escaped us yet. We will surely get them. We can overtake them yet. They will have only a few hours' start of us."

"But I think our best plan is to keep in deeper water."

"Certainly! We will slide ahead as far as Charleston and wait for them there. They will not be looking for us for they will no doubt think us out of the race."

"Just so."

Gardner was in high spirits. The chief engineer now expressed as his opinion that the rising tide would soon float the Hornet.

Very soon the tide set in and gradually the Hornet was lifted from her sandy bed.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF THE TRACK.

The loss of the Hornet would have been a serious matter to Colonel Gardner.

But fortunately this was not now deemed likely.

She was a valuable boat and had the tide not lifted her she must have been a total loss, for the first gale would have destroyed her.

But very soon she was afloat and all right again.

She proceeded more slowly now until a chance was afforded to leave the inner channel.

Once out of the shallow waters speed was resumed.

There was no doubt but that the lighter draught Janet was somewhere in the inner channel and they would reach Charleston before her.

But this was deemed the better plan.

It was far too risky trying to run her down in those shallow waters. The safer course was deemed by far the best.

So the Hornet stood on her course all that night for Charleston.

The next day she anchored just inside the bar.

A watch was kept for all sailing craft coming from the North.

All day long the watch was kept up.

But not a sign of the Janet became visible. She kept well out of sight.

When darkness came the detectives were disappointed. They realized that her chance for running past them in the darkness was good.

In that case the chase would be prolonged.

All that night they lay inside Charleston bar. But when daylight came nothing was seen of the Janet.

Harry snapped his fingers.

"They've fooled us all right," he said.

"I fear so," said Gardner.

Old King Brady smiled grimly.

"All right," he said, "let us drop down to Savannah. They may put in there."

So the Hornet was again put under way, and left Charleston behind.

It was about a twelve hours' run to Savannah. It was decided to enter the river and visit the town.

There was a possibility that the Janet had been abandoned at some point above and the party of fugitives had gone on by rail.

But this was only a theory. No one really credited it.

Every craft in the river was closely scrutinized.

The Janet certainly was not there. The detectives went ashore.

A telegram was sent to the warden of the Port of Charleston inquiring if the yacht Janet had entered or cleared that harbor.

But the reply was that no such craft had been seen or reported.

"It is queer," said Gardner. "They can't be lingering in those inside channels. They are somewhere on the way."

"Suppose we wait here twenty-four hours," said Old King Brady. "That will give them plenty of time. I have a theory that they will try to stop at Savannah."

• This move was decided upon.

The Hornet was tied up at a wharf and the little party proceeded to make themselves comfortable.

They strolled about the town until nightfall.

They consulted the reports of vessels sighted off the port and waited with much eagerness for the name of the Janet.

And finally their hopes were rewarded.

"Private yacht Janet, from New York, just sighted," was the report.

Instantly Gardner and the Bradys were on the qui vive.

"They are coming in," cried Gardner.

"Sure!"

"We will be ready to receive them. Shall we need police assistance?"

"I think not," said Old King Brady. "We ought to handle them all right alone."

Up the Savannah River sailed the little yacht until she was right in the bay. Then the Bradys got into a tender with Gardner and pulled off to her.

As they drew near they saw only two seamen on her deck.

A sudden chilling thought came to Harry.

"By Jove! Do you suppose they have skipped and sent her in here for a blind?"

It was a startling reflection. But Gardner now hailed the yacht's deck.

"Ahoy, the Janet," he cried.

"Ahoy!"

"Is your captain aboard?"

"I am the captain."

"Ah, I want to see Mr. David Strong."

The seaman came to the rail and looked down with idle curiosity.

"Well, you'll have to go on board the Galveston steamer Chickasaw," he said. "The whole party have gone aboard her, bound for Texas."

For a moment Gardner and the Bradys looked at each other in silent dismay.

"Fooled," ejaculated Gardner. "We are dead easy."

Old King Brady motioned to the boatmen to pull nearer to the yacht.

A few moments later all three clambered aboard.

"We are detectives," said Old King Brady. "We seek a member of that party. You will assist us in our duty."

The yacht skipper bowed.

"I will do what I can," he said.

"You say that they all boarded the Chickasaw?"

"Yes."

"And they are going to Galveston?"

"Yes."

"You remember the chase we gave you at Hatteras Inlet?"

"When you went aground? Yes!"

"Very good! How soon after you left us did you sight the Chickasaw?"

"The next morning!"

"What are your orders?"

"We have put in here for a new sail. Then we are going to Jacksonville. In time we shall sail for Honduras."

"Then your party are going to Central America?"

"I do not know."

"All right," said Old King Brady. "As a matter of form we will search your yacht and then you may carry out your orders."

"All right, sir!"

The Bradys proceeded to make a careful search of the Janet.

Nothing of value was found in the line of a clew. Finally the detectives and Gardner left the yacht.

"Well," asked the colonel, "what do you think of it, gentlemen?"

"It is plain that they intend to give us a good chase."

"I should say so!"

"Central America, however, is not a very distant point."

"Yet they will feel safe there."

"That depends! I believe we can make the authorities of those little republics give us extradition. But there is another plan."

"Ah, what is it?"

"I believe the Chickasaw stops at Key West, and also at Havana."

"Is that so?"

"I am quite sure. I know the regular Galveston steamers take in those points. But we can easily ascertain."

"Let us do so!"

"By all means!"

Going back to the wharf it was easy for the detectives to learn that this was the truth.

The Chickasaw stopped at both Key West and the port of Havana.

"I don't see what is to hinder their giving us the slip at Havana," said the colonel.

"I don't see why we should permit them to reach Havana."

"Ah, how can we prevent it?"

"We can take the fastest steamer to Key West. I believe we can get there before the Chickasaw leaves."

"Hurrah!" cried the colonel. "Let us try it."

"We will."

"But the Hornet—"

"Send her back to New York. We will not need her now."

This plan was quickly made.

The trio lost no time in giving the crew of the *Hornet* their instructions.

Then they boarded a train for Jacksonville, and soon were speeding southward.

It was easy to connect with the Tampa fast mail at Jacksonville and continue on without delay. The next morning they were at Tampa.

But now there occurred an exasperating delay.

They were obliged to wait until afternoon for the steamer.

But it took them away then on their way to Key West.

A few hours later the *Olivette* touched at the little island port where sponges and cigars win for it its worldwide fame.

Here a dismaying report was accorded them.

The *Chickasaw* had touched all Key West and gone on to Havana.

But we will not be but a few hours behind her," said the captain of the *Olivette*. "You ought to be able to get your men all right."

There was no alternative but to continue on board the *Olivette*.

They did so.

It was not a long run to Havana. In due time they reached that Cuban city.

The Bradys and Colonel Gardner were the first down the gang plank.

The *Chickasaw* lay at her wharf not far away.

The pursuers made their way thither quickly. While Old King Brady and Colonel Gardner went aboard Harry stood by the gang plank.

There were a number of passengers on the deck.

Old King Brady and the colonel took a hurried look about for their birds.

But they were not to be found.

"Let us go down and see the purser," said Old King Brady. "Very likely they are remaining in their state-rooms."

"Very good."

So they at once went down to the purser's cabin.

CHAPTER XII.

IN HAVANA.

That official received them politely.

"Yes," he said, "we did take four passengers from a pleasure yacht just below Hatteras. There were two men and two women."

"Have you their names on the list?"

"Yes."

The purser turned the pages.

"Mr. and Mrs. Swift of Brooklyn, and Mr. and Mrs. Bright of New York City."

"Swift and Bright," said Colonel Gardner with a smile.

"Well, that is appropriate."

The purser looked surprised.

"You know them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"They seemed to be good people. They got out of provisions and decided to try traveling by steamer."

"A very wise plan for them," said Old King Brady.

"Under the circumstances, yes."

"Are they aboard at present?" asked Colonel Gardner.

"No, sir."

"What? Do they not intend to go on to Galveston with you?"

"Nothing was said to me about it."

Old King Brady and the colonel looked at each other.

"Do you mean to say they have left the steamer?" asked Old King Brady.

"That is the size of it."

"And they are not coming back?"

"Not to my knowledge. We sail in three hours."

"Can you tell us where they have gone?"

The purser shook his head.

"I cannot and I know nothing about their plans," he said.

"You know all that I know."

This was enough.

Old King Brady and the colonel rejoined Harry.

The young detective was startled.

"We are fooled again," he said. "They have given us the slip and you'll find they mean to get out of Havana on another steamer."

"Perhaps they have before this."

"Perhaps so!"

"We must look it up."

It is needless to say that in the next hour they did some hustling.

Colonel Gardner was a good Spaniard and the Bradys knew the language fairly well.

They made inquiries at the custom-house and of the officers of the port.

They learned the names and sailing hours of all the steamers in port.

They now paid a visit to every one of these steamers.

Everything possible was done to ascertain if the fugitives had taken passage on one of these.

But no surety could be made except by being present at the sailing of each vessel.

The detectives were thus engaged when they ran across the purser of the *Olivette*.

"Oh, by the way," he cried, "I forgot to ask you your names. Those people, Bright and Swift, left a letter in my charge."

This was a surprise.

"My name is Brady," said Harry. "This gentleman's name is Gardner."

"Brady—Gardner! That is it," cried the purser. "Here is the letter."

The astonishment of the colonel and the detectives was very great.

They took the letter handed them by the purser.

"It is Strong's handwriting," said Gardner. "Let me see it."

He broke the seal and read the contents.

"To Sam Gardner, and the two Brady detectives.

"This is to warn you that you are on a hopeless chase. You can't catch us, and you will never be able to tell where we are. We fooled you all right at Savannah. Now, the best thing you can do, Gardner, is go back to Long Branch. Mrs. Jones can easily get a divorce. As for you detectives, go back and try something new. You will have better luck and save your reputation. Yours in earnest,

"DAVID STRONG."

Gardner bit his lip.

"Well," he muttered. "that's what I call saucy. The cool nerve of the fellow! I can hardly believe that he is the Dave Strong I used to know."

"To a large extent he is right," said Old King Brady.

"How so?"

"They have fooled us all right."

"Oh, yes, that is true."

"But he is a little too confident. Moreover, he does not know his men. We do not give up."

"Do you think they are in Havana at the present moment?"

Old King Brady was thoughtful.

"That is hard to say," he said. "We can only guess. But at any event, we must search the city."

"Very good!"

All that day was spent in the close quest for the fugitives. Not until the day was near its close was a clue found. Then a Cuban cab driver gave them a tip.

"I carried two Americanos and their senoritas out to Tres Palmas," he declared.

"What sort of a place is Tres Palmas?" asked Gardner. The driver held up his hands.

"Ah, senors, a fine place. A place in the palms, where fair senoritas and their lovers go to dance and see the waves of the Gulf."

"Ah," said Harry, with sudden inspiration, "that is just it. A sort of shore resort outside of Havana. Just the place to find them."

The cab driver gesticulated and nodded in eager assent.

"All right," said Gardner. "Let us go out there at once."

The result was that all three climbed into the carriage and were driven away toward Tres Palmas.

Out of the city they rolled and along a coquina paved roadway which overlooked the sea.

It was now quite dark and the vehicles and horsemen they met were hardly distinguishable.

The air was soft and balmy and the twang of an occasional guitar and the full notes of a Spanish song were heard.

Overhead hung the starlit canopy of heaven.

"Delightful climate," said Harry, as he took in the fragrance of the air. "An ideal existence, this life in Cuba."

"But hot," said Old King Brady. "When you recollect the grim spectre of yellow fever, the illusion vanishes."

"Just as on the African veldt," said Gardner. "An ideal country for the stock raiser. At least, so he assumes, until some morning he finds half his herd dead from the bite of the tsetse fly."

"Every climate has its faults."

"Indeed, yes. I have seen beautiful defiles through porphyry and jasper in the wilds of Arizona. Galleries of nature exceeding in beauty the finest creation of man. Purling springs and fragrant flowers, a perfect Paradise. Yet, one must guard his hand from the lurking tarantula, the scorpion or perhaps the death dealing rattlesnake hidden in some crevice. Vanish all the beauties of nature then, when grisly death is seen behind the veil."

"That is so!" agreed Old King Brady. "The most delicious draught often has dregs of poison."

"And so society, with its apparently innocent guise, only masks a possible hideous crime."

"Life is a queer mixture," declared Gardner. "Through all this delightful scene, we are traveling with hardly an appreciative thought, and seeking only to bring a fellow being to the gallows."

The cab rolled on and now descending a winding road came to an outlook over the Gulf. Here lights were seen and the sounds of revelry heard.

Tres Palmas was a favorite resort for the young bloods and their senoritas from Havana.

It was possible to get wines and cigarettes and pass the evening dancing or swinging in a hammock over the still waters of the starlit sea.

And it was to this place the fugitives had come, if the story of the cab driver was to be believed.

The detectives and the colonel left the cab and joined the merry throng.

The piazzas of the hacienda were thronged with Cubans.

The ladies in the light, filmy gowns and mantillas and the gentlemen in their white duck suits and Panama hats, looked very attractive.

The three visitors mingled with the crowd.

For a long time they wandered aimlessly about.

But they as yet saw nothing of their birds.

"Hang it all," said Harry finally, "I believe that rascally cab driver played it on us for the sake of the fares."

"If he did I'll wring his neck when next I see him," said the colonel.

But he was ready to take back the threat the next moment.

The party suddenly turned the corner of the wide piazza.

At a table under the overhanging branch of one of the Tres Palmas sat a man and woman.

At sight of him the colonel and the detectives paused.

At sight of them the man and his companion gave a start.

"Hello, Strong!" drawled the colonel in a quiet way. "Just got your letter, you know. Thought I'd take your advice to the contrary and look you up."

For a moment Strong was utterly speechless.

He glared at his old comrade and the detectives in a startled way. It was a surprise to him.

"What brought you out here?" he asked curtly.

"You!" replied Gardner tersely.

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"Preposterous! What do you want with me?"

"Oh, not so very much, after all," drawled the colonel as he sank into a chair by the table. "Pardon me! My friends the Messrs. Brady of New York."

CHAPTER XIII.

A COMPROMISE.

Strong's face was crimson.

Moreover alarm was depicted in his face.

It was certain that he had never once dreamed of running across the colonel and the detectives in this place.

Strong bowed stiffly at the introduction. All this while his companion sat silent.

"Ah, on my word," said Gardner coolly, "I must beg the honor. Your wife, I suppose."

"Yes, sir," said Strong stiffly.

"Much charmed! Very happy, Mrs. Strong. I trust you find the Cuban air grateful?"

"Very much so," replied Janet Foster, icily.

But Gardner had no time to waste on her.

"Of course, this is a deuced surprise to you, Strong. You didn't expect to see me soon after our little race in the Hatteras Inlet."

"What have you followed me here for?" demanded Strong angrily.

"You assume that I have followed you?"

"I do."

"Well, to tell the truth, you can give us valuable information concerning a very mysterious crime committed at Long Branch a while ago."

"A crime!"

"Yes."

"I know nothing about it."

"Oh, yes, you do! We saw you with the criminal himself."

"Oh, that is all rot. No crime has been committed. You can't arrest anybody."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. It's just this way: Holland Jones took a notion to throw over his wife and seek his fortunes in a new land.

"Certainly there is no law to compel him to live with her. He left her well fixed. He is with the lady he loves. Foolishly he sought to play a little game to make people think he had been murdered and was out of the world. You and these detectives have sifted the matter down. But there's

no criminal charge to work upon and you might as well save your time and go back to New York.

Strong spoke contemptuously and with conviction.

Gardner was spokesman and the Bradys did not intervene.

"That is your view of it," said the colonel quietly. "So far as you are concerned, Dave, we do not care. Where is Jones?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you leave him?"

"In Havana."

"You expect to join him again?"

"That is my affair."

"It is ours also."

"I fail to see it."

"Well, we shall compel you to."

"Compel me!"

"Yes."

Strong was very angry.

"Well, I should like to see you," he blustered. "If you attempt to interfere with my personal liberty you'll get into trouble. I am in no crime—"

"Wait a moment. You are connected with a crime!"

"A crime!"

"Yes."

"I don't see it. I am not a forger or a thief. A thief don't skip out with his employer."

"That is not the question. The crime we refer to is a serious one."

"What is it?"

"Murder!"

Both Strong and the woman with him gave a sharp cry.

"Murder?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean? Don't talk in riddles. I know nothing of any murder. I am not concerned in it."

"But Holland Jones is, and we have proof of it."

"Holland Jones a murderer?"

"Yes."

Strong and Janet Foster were now stricken with fear. They were very pale.

"That is pretty strong. Who did the murder?" asked Strong.

"You remember the particulars of the affair at the bath house at Long Branch."

"Yes, it was a put up job."

"Just so! Now, again you remember that the body of a dead man was found in the marsh and assumed to be that of Jones."

"Yes."

"Well, it has proved to be the body of Stephen Cardozo, and it is known that he was murdered and his body placed in the marsh by Holland Jones."

That Strong and Janet Foster had been all unaware of this was certain.

They were dumbfounded.

"You say you have proof of this?" asked Strong huskily.

"Yes."

"Whew! It is a pretty serious charge. I have never suspected it—"

"But it is true. Fear of being accused of this crime was the main cause of Jones' leaving his home and trying to bury himself from the world forever."

"To lose his identity as it were."

"Yes."

Strong whistled softly.

"Well, I never thought that of Jones," he reflected. "I wonder if Fannie knows of it?"

"She knows all, and is concerned in the plot."

"Ugh! Well, I can tell you that we are not."

"Then, why did you take your departure in such a suspicious way?"

"Why, I am a partner with Jones in a Central American enterprise. We are going to Golden Cay, an island of tropical beauty in the Caribbean Sea. There we expect to found a small republic among the Caribs and live like princes the rest of our lives."

"Very quixotic! Very romantic," said Gardner. "But I fear you will never realize the game."

"Well, it's Jones' plan. We are only led by him."

"Just so! Now, the wisest thing you can do is to turn in with us and help us to bring him to justice. You were once a man of honor, Dave. Remember the old days and let me help you to get back."

For a moment Strong was silent.

He shot a meaning glance at Janet. Then he said:

"Of course, it's easy enough for me. I'm not afraid to go back to New York. I've committed no crime. In fact, if Jones is a murderer, I don't want to travel any further with him."

"That's it," said Gardner, cheerfully. "Now you are talking sense."

"I want to go back to New York," said Janet. "I don't care about your tropical islands."

"It's a go!" cried Strong. "I throw up the game."

"Give us your hand, Dave."

They shook hands.

"Now, you'll help us to find Jones?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"They live in a stone house or hacienda not far from the Morro Castle plaza. I can take you there."

"To-night?"

"Yes, now."

"Did you intend to stay in Havana long?"

"Until the Janet arrived. She was to come here for us."

"Ah, I see. Then you think we will find Jones there?"

"Oh, yes. I know the house well. I will take you right to it," said Strong, eagerly. "I am glad to be out of the scrape. Yes, we will find a carriage. I have a driver waiting."

With this Strong turned and was about to walk away.

But Old King Brady put a hand on his arm.

"Where are you going?"

Strong affected surprise.

"Why, I was going to find the driver and the carriage."

"I will go with you."

"Oh, I see," laughed Strong. "You are afraid I'll run away. All right! I am satisfied. Come on!"

"Hold on!" cried Gardner. "Let us all go."

Strong offered his arm to Janet.

"Very well!" he agreed. "It is the best we can do, Janet."

"I am satisfied," declared the woman. "If I once get back to New York, I'll stay there."

"Ditto!" agreed Strong.

And so all passed out of the pleasure gardens of Tres Palmas and came to a plaza where a number of carriages were in waiting.

Strong found his driver without any trouble.

"Si, Senor," declared the fellow with a profound bow.

"All can ride in safety. I will take you to the Morro Plaza."

But it was necessary for two to sit on the upper box.

So Harry sat with Strong and Janet in the interior.

Old King Brady and Gardner sat above.

"Well," said the colonel as he lit a cigarette, "things seem to be coming our way, Mr. Brady."

"Decidedly so, at present," agreed the old detective.

"If we can clap our hands on Jones and Fannie, the case is ended."

"Jones will hang."

"I see no help for him. Of course, it is a sad thing for his family."

"But it is justice."

"Exactly!"

"However," said Old King Brady, "we must not be too confident. We have not got Jones yet."

"I don't see how we can lose him."

"Indeed, it is a very easy matter."

"There is nobody to give him warning."

"Very true. Yet, there are more ways than one for him to slip us. I know that from experience."

"Your experience is wide."

"Well, yes. I remember of a certain instance where we were seriously baffled. We secured our man as we supposed and put him behind bars. We had a world of evidence. Yet, we were beaten."

"He escaped?"

"Oh, no."

"How could that be, then?"

"A very simple matter. The man we imprisoned and fairly convicted was really the wrong man. He was due to sit in the electric chair, when we learned the truth just in time to get a reprieve and save him."

"Whew!" gasped the colonel. "How did you get hold of the truth?"

"Well, by chance we hit upon a new clue and got hold of the right man. We faced him with the evidence and he confessed."

"By Jove, the wrong man might have suffered!"

"Yes."

"Is that a common occurrence?"

"More common than one would suppose. It is not always possible to get the right evidence."

"But—can there be any mistake in Jones' case?"

"Oh, no. I think not. In fact, I am quite sure we shall be able to make him confess."

"I hope so."

"At any rate, the evidence against Jones is pretty clear."

"Yes, that is so. If I thought there was any doubt, though—"

"Have no fear. If there is, he shall have the benefit of it."

The carriage by this time was rolling into Havana.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CLEVER TRICK.

The driver had received instructions from Strong just where to drive. In fact, the New Yorker had taken some time to make the understanding with him explicit.

Through narrow, dark and ill-smelling streets, the carriage was driven.

The sanitary provisions of Havana are the worst possible.

Finally they turned into a narrow, dingy alley.

There were no lights.

Strong leaped out and said:

"Let Janet stay here in the carriage. We shall come right back. If, however, you choose, let one of the detectives remain with her."

The Bradys hesitated.

Then it occurred to Old King Brady that it mattered little if the woman did escape.

Strong and Jones were the men they wanted.

"All right! Let her stay here. We will trust to her honor. At any rate, if she tries to get away, it will be of little advantage to her."

"Just so!" agreed Strong.

"Oh, don't fear," said Janet, "I will be here when you come back."

So Gardner and the Bradys followed Strong into a narrow portico. Just as he stepped out of the carriage, though, Strong had made a sign to the driver who leaped down and went ahead of them.

"The house is in the inner court," said Strong. "He knows the way better than I do."

The Cuban driver lifted the latch of a grated door in the stone wall which rose before them and shut the court or garden of the hacienda from the street.

This is the custom with all Cuban houses.

The street side of the houses presents barred windows and iron doors, like those of a prison. The bright side is within.

"Pass in, Senors," said the driver, swinging the iron door back with a profound bow.

Strong stepped aside and Harry passed in first.

A dimly lit court yard was seen beyond.

Old King Brady followed next, Gardner was the last.

So intent were the three men upon getting a possible glimpse of Jones in the place that for a moment they did not think of Strong.

Gardner half checked himself, but received a terrific blow in the back of the neck which sent him rolling against the Bradys.

Then the door clanged.

A mocking laugh and retreating footsteps were heard.

Then, like a flash, the realization that they were tricked came to the dupes.

"Thunder!" gasped Gardner, "we are in a trap, boys. He is getting away. Quick! burst that door open!"

Anger that they should have allowed themselves to be so easily duped consumed the entrapped men.

They flung themselves against the iron door.

But it would not yield.

They pounded upon it and shouted in vain. Nobody seemed within hearing.

To scale the stone wall was the next thought.

After a fatal delay, finally an old ladder was found and they were able to scale it.

Dropping down upon the other side they reached the street, defeated, humiliated and much abashed.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Harry. "Why didn't we think of that rascal? The idea of letting him get in our rear."

"I never suspected treachery," said Old King Brady. "Well, it is a good lesson."

"There is only one thing for us to do," said Gardner.

"What?"

"Give up the job."

"Oh, no!" said the detectives. "You may get a worse set back than this. The only thing to do is to keep going."

"I suppose so."

"We'll have to win in the end."

"Where do you suppose that scoundrel will go?"

"You may be sure he will rejoin Jones."

"Weren't we stupid! I wondered what he was holding such a lengthy confab with the driver for!"

"Just so."

"Well, as you say, we can only keep pegging on. We must and will win out."

"Of course, we will."

"It looks like a random quest, though. Of course, they will get out of Havana."

"I should imagine they would," agreed Old King Brady.

"However, they might hide here indefinitely for all we might do. The Havana police could give us little aid."

"That is the worst of it."

The three disgruntled men now walked back into the lighted thoroughfares of the city.

It was some while before they gained their equilibrium after this bit of an upset.

Finally, they emerged upon a great plaza where people were promenading and a band was discoursing music.

They mingled with the crowd and sought in vain for a possible glimpse of their birds.

Nothing was gained that night. The next day they resumed the quest and ransacked Havana.

They enlisted the services of the Havana police as far as they could.

Meanwhile they kept watch of the steamer wharves and the departing tourists. But not the least possible clew could they gain.

"Too bad!" declared Harry. "On my word, it is hard luck. To think of having the game right in our hands and losing it."

"Of course, they are wholly on their guard now," said Old King Brady.

"What do you think of that story of Strong in regard to their sailing aboard the Janet for Golden Cay?"

"Can anyone tell where Golden Cay is?" asked Old King Brady.

"There are many cays or coral islands in the Caribbean Sea."

"That is so. But the Caribs who dwell on those islets are particularly hostile to white men. It would not be easy for them to find settlement there."

"No," declared Old King Brady. "I believe that was only a subterfuge to mislead us. You can depend upon it they will go in some other direction."

"So I believe," agreed Gardner. "I fancy they will now seek to get passage to some European port. They may go to Port au Prince or some nearby point where they can get a European steamer."

"Hayti!" exclaimed Old King Brady. "I'll wager that is their game. It is easy to get passage from Port au Prince, at least to Bermuda, and thence to England."

"We are dull, if they forestall us," said Harry.

"But they will not sail from Havana, you may be sure."

"There are other ports, Matanzas, for instance."

"Or Santiago."

"Hello!" yelled Harry, turning like a flash, and as if given an electric shock.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Old King Brady, staring at the young detective, who was acting like a maniac.

"Don't you see him? There he goes! Of course you see him. That is the fellow," cried the young detective, excitedly.

"Who?"

"Why, the cab driver."

"The cab driver!"

Old King Brady and Gardner followed the direction indicated by Harry.

"There he is!"

"Sure enough."

Across the plaza the driver of the cab was leisurely jogging his horses. In a moment Harry hailed him.

He pulled up.

Old King Brady was at his horses' bridles in a moment. Harry went up onto the box with a leap.

"Ah, Sebastian," cried the young detective in Spanish,

"we have found you. What did the Americano pay you for locking us into that dark hole last night?"

"Jesu, Senors! I do not know what you mean."

"No lying to us, you worm! We know you. He paid you well for it."

"It was a joke, Senors. I swear it was."

"Was it? Well, tell us now where you took the senor and senorita?"

"To the Hotel Pasaje!"

"That's a lie!"

The fellow dropped a Spanish curse.

"Hold on!" cried Harry, "which would you rather have?" He showed a handful of coin. "Here are many pesos. Over yonder is the calaboose. What shall it be?"

The fellow's crafty gaze was fixed on the money.

"Ah, senors, I serve!" he said, abjectly. "You shall command me."

Harry poured the coins into his hands.

"Where did you take them?" he asked.

"They have gone with Mendoza in his boat," he replied. "I drove them to the shore. They sailed for Hayti."

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH ENDS THE CASE.

There was no reason to doubt Sebastian. He spoke earnestly.

"It is the truth! I swear by Saint Gabriel!" he declared.

"Who is Mendoza?"

"He is a fisherman and has a fast sloop. He sails to Hayti and back. There were four of them. Two senoritas and two senors. I know no more."

The detectives and Gardner listened to this with interest.

"Enough!" said the colonel. "I believe him. Come on, gentlemen. Let us get the first steamer to Hayti."

Sebastian drove away and Gardner and the detectives started for the wharves.

At first they feared that they would have trouble in finding passage to Hayti.

No steamer was to leave Havana for Port au Prince under forty-eight hours.

If Mendoza's craft was a good sailer the fugitives might get there and away on a European steamer before they could be overhauled.

But suddenly Gardner heard a cheery voice at his elbow.

"Hello, Gardner! What in Tophet are you doing in this part of the world?"

The colonel turned.

He was face to face with a nattily dressed young Englishman in a white yachting suit. He wore the insignia of the Royal Yacht Club of Cowes.

"Lord Ralston," gasped Gardner. "Whew! What a surprise! I might ask you the same question."

"It is easy to answer," said the young nobleman. "There is my yacht, the Loch Leven, over yonder. I am making a tour of the Indies."

"The deuce you are! I say, you are the same old six pence as when we lived together in barracks in old Cape Colony."

"To be sure! Do you think I'll change, although I have come into my estates?"

"And you are a Duke!"

"Yes, but a man just the same."

"Good for you!" cried Gardner.

"Your Grace, allow me to introduce you to the two greatest detectives in the world, Old and Young King Brady."

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "An honor, really. We have some very good detectives at Scotland Yard."

"But none to excel the Bradys of New York," said Gardner.

"Colonel Gardner is extravagant," said Old King Brady. "Our claims are very modest."

"And modesty is the greatest and rarest of virtues," declared the Duke. "But come! I want you to see the Loch Leven. She is the best boat ever built on the Clyde. We sail in two hours for Hayti."

"For Hayti!" exclaimed Gardner.

"Yes."

"Great Jupiter! I wish your boat was a steamer and you were the captain?"

"Why?" asked the Duke.

"We would take passage with you. We are bound for Hayti in a hurry."

"Well, now," ejaculated His Grace, "that is clever. You will save your passage money by going with me."

"Ah! I am not begging passage."

"Take care! Don't offend me, Gardner. Let me know why you are in such hot haste to get to Hayti with two detectives. There must be something in the wind."

"And so there is. We are after a murderer."

"By Jove!" he cried, "what an adventure. Say, but I'm dying for some excitement. Will you let me into the scheme?"

"Ralston," said the colonel, "you are a mighty good fellow. We want to get to Hayti in hot haste, but we can't impose on you."

"Aw, yes," he reflected. "It would be a condemned shame. At any rate, come aboard the Loch Leven and tell me what you think of her?"

So Gardner and the Bradys were rowed off to the yacht in a beautiful brass trimmed boat manned by a couple of blue jackets.

The Duke was at present alone on aboard.

"I shall meet a party of friends at Port au Prince," he said. "And won't I have a pretty story to tell them!"

Gardner drew a deep breath.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "will we really be trespassing on your good nature to beg passage to Hayti?"

The Duke swore impatiently.

"I used to like you for your good sense, Gardner," he said. "Now, don't disappoint me."

"Oh, well, since you insist," drawled the colonel.

In a short while the Loch Leven was speeding out of Havana harbor.

Ralston was deeply interested in the affair.

"If we only knew the course the Cuban skipper would take we might run him down," he said.

"Can't we judge by the wind?" said Gardner.

"Yes, to some extent. He will lie to the south to make a free run over to the east on the last leg of his course," said the Duke with nautical prescience. "I'll talk with our skipper."

The Loch Leven's skipper declared that he could judge pretty well what a sailing craft's course would be by the prevailing wind.

"Hurrah!" cried Gardner, "won't it be luck to run them down!"

The Loch Leven made a quick run to Port au Prince.

But no sign was seen of the Cuban boat or any craft of the kind.

At Port au Prince they took leave of the Duke of Ralston who was joined by a party of friends.

"I hope you'll get your man, Gardie," cried the Duke, cheerily, as he parted from the colonel and the Bradys.

"If all noblemen were like that fellow, it would be an enviable thing to be a duke," said Old King Brady.

"You are right!" agreed the colonel, "and now we must wait the arrival of our birds."

"First, let us make sure that they are not already here," said Harry.

"That's right," agreed Old King Brady. "There's a Jamaica steamer over there ready to sail for England."

"I don't believe Mendoza could have got them here so quickly."

"Nevertheless, they may have boarded some faster craft as they did once before."

"Very good! Let us go over there at once."

So they crossed the quay and came to the gang plank of the Vulture. She was a steamer of the tramp class.

Her first officer was at the plank.

"Yes!" he replied to Old King Brady's query. "We have a few cabin passengers. We picked up four from a sail boat, this side of Cuba."

"We are sure they are friends of ours," said Harry. "Do we have your permission to go aboard?"

"Certainly!"

Very leisurely Old King Brady and Gardner ascended the plank. Harry remained on the quay.

The old detective and the colonel made their way to the upper deck.

An awning was spread to kill the hot rays of the sun.

Beneath this were a party of four, two men and two women. They were laughing and talking.

On a table was heaped tropical fruit and a basket of wine.

Gardner leisurely strolled nearer. One of the men turned his head.

It was Strong.

At sight of the colonel every bit of color left the fellow's face.

"Perdition!" he gasped, "it is all up!"

Jones turned and his flabby face was ghastly in its hue.

"Gardner!" he ejaculated.

"Really sorry to disturb you," said Gardner, politely, "but you are badly wanted in New York, Jones. A great many of your friends there mourn your death."

"I played my best hand," he said. "I wanted to get out of the world. You always wanted Harriet. Why didn't you take her and let me go?"

"That is not the whole of the story," interposed Old King Brady. "You are the only man who can explain the whereabouts of Stephen Cardozo, whose body was mistaken for yours."

Jones gave a gurgling gasp. His eyes seemed starting from their sockets. He gazed at Old King Brady and then at the actress by his side.

"It's all over, Fannie," he said, hoarsely. "It can't be, you see. All right. Be happy. My life is over."

Jones stood close to the rail. Before a move could be made to stop him he leaped over it.

There was forty feet of transparent water under the steamer. He closed his lungs as he went down.

But the horrified spectators on deck saw a giant body shoot upward through the water, great jaws flashed and bit the drowning man in half. Holland Jones had cheated justice. The shark was the real avenger.

Strong and the two women were taken back to New York.

As no proof was to be had of their complicity in Cardozo's murder, however, they were not prosecuted. But the great Long Branch case was the subject of interest for many days.

The Bradys had unravelled the mystery of the bath house. The case was at an end.

Colonel Gardner went back to South Africa. Mrs. Jones continued to live at Long Branch. Whether she will become the bride of the man she really loved in latter life, only time can tell.

The detectives were speedily engaged in the solving of another case, of which we may write at a later day.

[THE END.]

Read "THE BRADYS AND THE LOST GOLD MINE; OR, HOT WORK AMONG THE COW-BOYS," which will be the next number (124) of "Secret Service."

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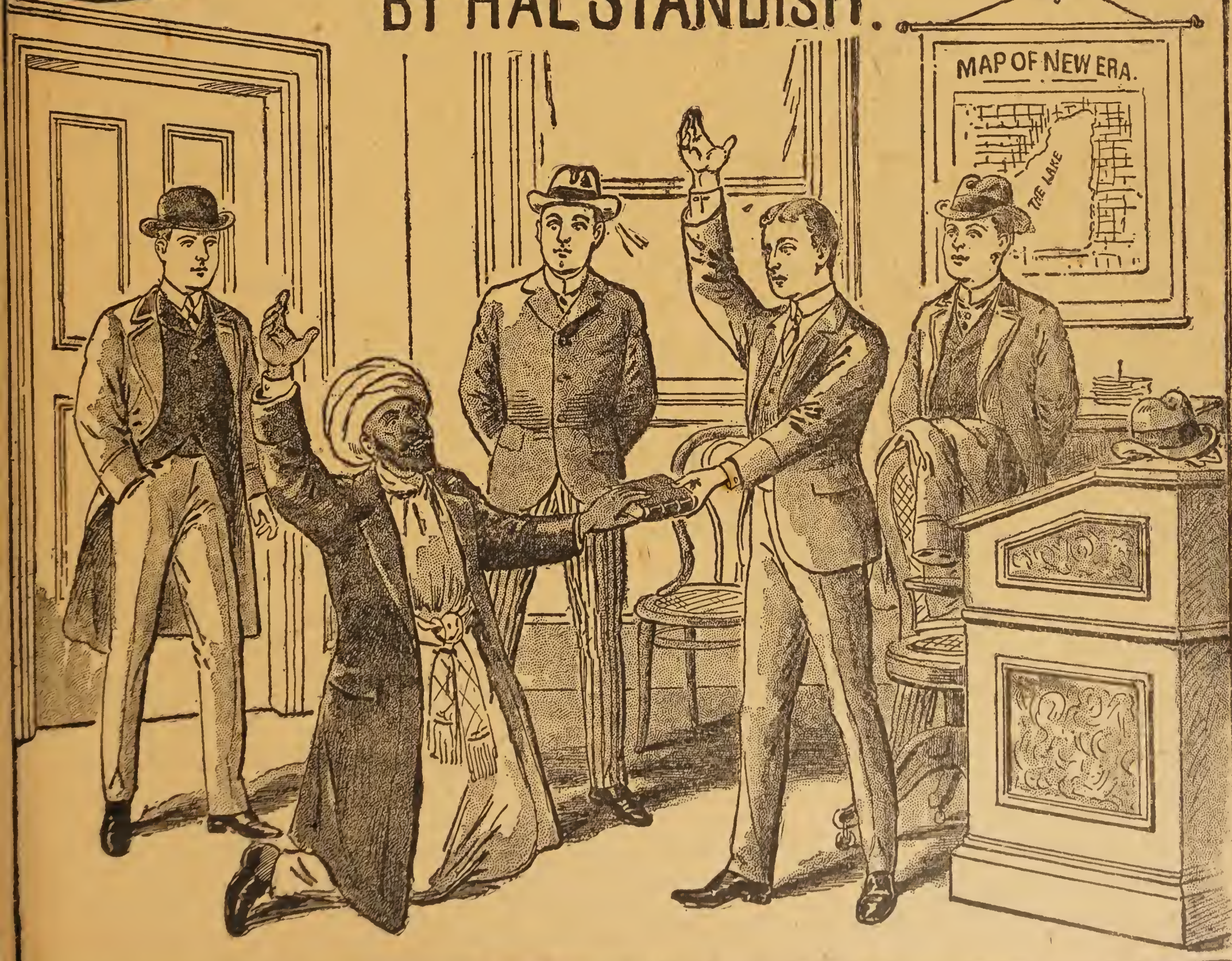
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